

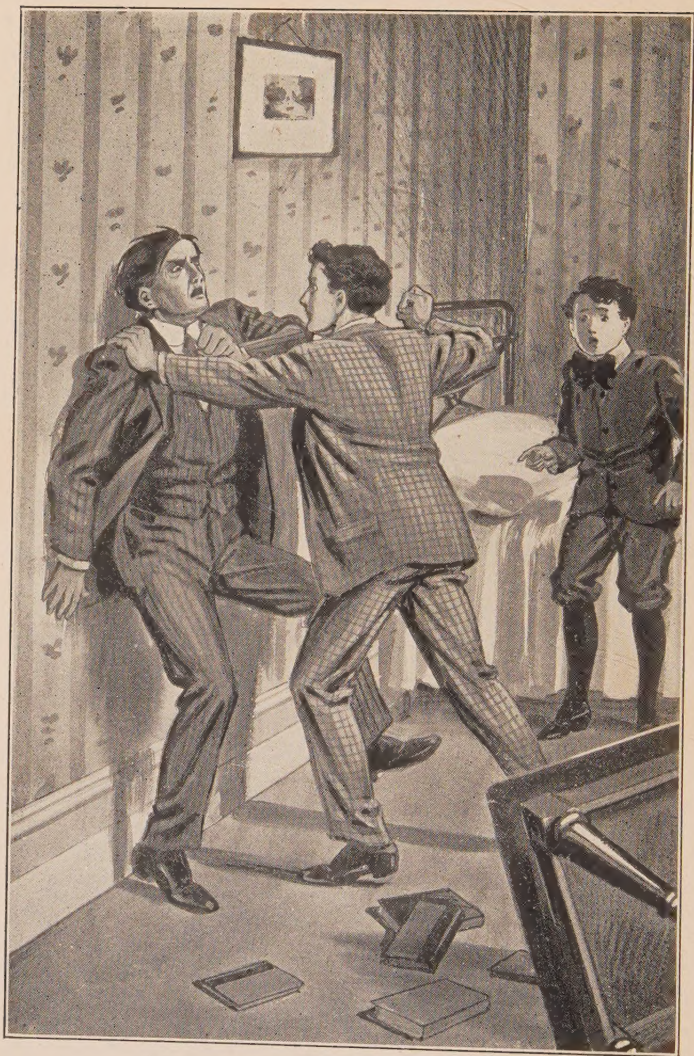
LARRY DEXTER AND THE STOLEN BOY



HOWARD R. GARIS



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LARRY FORCED THE MAN AGAINST THE WALL.—Page 198
Larry Dexter and the Stolen Boy.

LARRY DEXTER AND THE STOLEN BOY

OR

A YOUNG REPORTER ON
THE LAKES

BY

HOWARD R. GARIS

AUTHOR OF "LARRY DEXTER'S GREAT SEARCH," "LARRY DEXTER,
REPORTER," "DICK HAMILTON'S FORTUNE," "DICK HAMILTON'S
CADET DAYS," "DICK HAMILTON'S FOOTBALL TEAM," ETC.

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BY HOWARD R. GARIS

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Larry Dexter and the Stolen Boy

PREFACE

MY DEAR BOYS:

Most unexpected things happen to newspaper reporters. That is one reason why, in spite of the hard work attached to the profession, so many bright young lads like it. It was that way with Larry Dexter. It was the unexpected that he was always looking for, and nearly always he found it.

In this, the fifth book of "The Young Reporter Series," I have related for you something that happened when Larry unexpectedly went to a concert. Before he knew it he was involved in a mystery that had to do with a stolen boy.

How he promised the stricken mother to find her son for her, how he picked up slender clues and followed them, how, seemingly beaten and

baffled, he still kept to the trail—all this I have set down for you in this book as well as I knew how.

I hope it is not presuming too much to say that I trust you will like this volume as well as you have my other books. Larry is a character to be proud of, and I have tried to do him justice.

Yours sincerely,

HOWARD R. GARIS.

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LARRY DEXTER AND THE STOLEN BOY

CHAPTER I

A FRIGHTENED SINGER

"HELLO, Larry, just the chap I want to see!" greeted Paul Rosberg, one of the oldest reporters on the New York *Leader*, as a tall, good-looking young fellow came into the city room one September afternoon. "I've been hoping you'd show up."

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Larry Dexter, the "star" man on the *Leader*, when it came to solving strange cases and mysteries. "Do you want the loan of five dollars, or has your typewriter gone out of commission?"

"Neither," replied Paul Rosberg, with a smile, though he knew Larry would oblige him were it necessary. For Larry Dexter had a natural talent for machinery, and often adjusted the "balky" typewriters of his fellow reporters. Also, he would lend them cash when they were temporarily embarrassed, not to say broke. For Larry had made considerable money of late, especially in solving the big bank mystery, and

he was always willing and ready to lend to his less fortunate brethren.

"Then, if it isn't either one of those things, I can't imagine what it is," went on the young reporter, as he sat down at his desk. The city room was nearly vacant, all the other reporters having gone home. For the last edition of the *Leader* was off the presses, and work for the day was over, the sheet being an afternoon one.

"I want you to do me a favor," went on Mr. Rosberg, who was considerably older than Larry, and, as he spoke the man began reaching in his various pockets as if searching for something. "You haven't anything on for to-night, have you?"

"No, I've been out on a Sunday special story, and I've cleaned it up. It didn't take me as long as I expected, so I thought I'd come back to the office to see if Mr. Emborg had anything else for me."

"You're too conscientious Larry; altogether too fussy," spoke his companion. "But I'm tickled to pieces that you did come in. I was hoping you, or some of the other obliging lads would, for I'm stuck on a night assignment that I don't want, and it comes at a bad time. There, cover that for me, will you?"

He handed Larry two slips of pasteboard, theater tickets, as was evident at first glance.

"Hum!" mused Larry as he looked at them. "Farewell appearance of Madame Androletti, eh?"

I wonder how many 'farewell' appearances she's had? This must be about the forty-ninth. She'll soon finish up at this rate. 'Grand concert and musicale,' " he went on reading. "Musicale with a final 'e' no less. In the new Music Hall, to-night, too. I say, Mr. Rosberg, what does it mean, anyhow? Do you want me to go to this concert with you?"

"No, Larry, I want you to cover it for me. Report it, if you like that better. Say, look here, old man" (Larry was not an old man by any means, but the term was used as a friendly one), "this is my wedding anniversary to-night, and I promised my little lady that I'd come home early to a supper celebration she's gotten up. Then, at the last minute, the editor wants me to cover this concert. Seems as though Madame Androletti has some pull with the paper, and wants a representative at her concert, though I don't see why the morning paper reporters wouldn't do as well.

"But, as you know, I've been doing theatricals and musicales for this sheet for some time, and they want me to cover this. Not that I need to do it personally, but they expect me to look after it. Now, I don't want to go, and that's why I'm asking you to cover it for me."

"But look here!" cried Larry, lamely accepting the tickets which the other held out. "I don't know anything about music. That is, not enough to report a concert. I like it, and all that, but I don't know how to grind out that stuff about high

notes, colatura work, placement, ensemble, vocal range, and all that sort of thing, that I see in your accounts of musical doings every once in a while. I'd make a mess of it."

"That's all right, Larry," spoke the musical critic. "I've thought of that. I'll do all the fancy 'word-slinging.' I'll write the story to-morrow morning. All I want you to do is to go there and bring me back a program. You can ask the leader of the orchestra if it was carried out. He'll jot down the names of any extra numbers the madame may have sung as encores. Then it will be up to me. I know nearly all the concert pieces anyhow, and I can fix up an account.

"Just you keep your eyes open, size up the crowd, watch how the lady sings, get me a few notes about her bouquets and all that, and I'll do the rest. It won't be the first time I've written about a concert without being there."

"But," objected Larry, "I won't know whether she's singing good, bad or indifferent."

"No trouble about that," spoke the other. "Madame Androletti always sings well. I've heard her."

"But won't Mr. Emborg object?" asked Larry, naming the city editor.

"No, I've fixed it with him. I asked him if I couldn't get some one to cover the concert for me, on account of my celebration to-night, and he said it was up to me. So I've drawn you. Pshaw, Larry, it's easy! Anybody who can solve

a million-dollar bank mystery the way you did, can surely cover a simple concert."

"But it's so different," objected the young reporter.

"Not at all. It just needs common sense. Go ahead now, cover it for me," and with this Mr. Rosberg hurried out of the room, leaving Larry standing there, holding the two concert tickets.

"Take some one with you—your best girl," the older reporter called back, and he caught the elevator, and rapidly descended to the street.

"Well, I guess I'm in for it," mused Larry, as he looked at the tickets in his hand. They were choice seats, he noted, and, had he been obliged to buy them, they would have cost five dollars. That was one advantage of being a reporter.

"Take my girl with me," went on the young reporter. • "Well, why not? I wonder if Molly Mason wouldn't like to go?" and Larry's thoughts went to the pretty department-store clerk, who had helped him solve the million-dollar bank mystery. "I'll call her on the 'phone. She can't have left the store yet," he went on. A few minutes later he listened to her rapturous acceptance.

"Oh, Larry!" she exclaimed, "of course I'll be *delighted* to go. I've just got a new dress, and, oh, it's awfully nice of you to ask me, I'm sure."

"I'm being nice to myself," answered Larry. "All right; I'll call for you about eight."

And so that was how, a few hours afterward,

Larry rolled up to the modest apartment house where Molly Mason lived, the young reporter arriving in a taxicab.

"Oh, what luxurious extravagance!" exclaimed Molly, as she sank down on the cushions. "Why did you do it?"

"Oh, as long as I'm going to report a swell concert I might as well do it in style," replied Larry. "I hope you'll like it."

"Oh, I know I shall!" she exclaimed.

An usher showed them to their seats. The hall was beginning to fill, and Larry and his companion looked around curiously, not that Larry was not used to the members of "swell" society, for his duties had often taken him among them, and he had come to have rather a common regard for that class of persons.

But to Miss Mason it was a dream of delight, as, on her slender wages, she seldom got a chance to attend expensive amusements, for she had to help support her family. The audience was a rich as well as cultivated one, as Larry soon saw.

"There, I forgot to get programs!" he exclaimed, after he and Molly were comfortably seated. "I'll go back and get a couple. I won't be a minute."

She nodded brightly, and resumed her gaze about the rapidly-filling theater. From the depths back of, and under the stage, could be heard the mysterious, and alway thrilling, sounds of the orchestra tuning up.

As Larry picked up two programs from the table in the lobby he saw a tall, large man, conspicuous in a dress suit, with some sort of ribbon decoration pinned to the lapel of his coat, enter the rear of the auditorium. The man stood gazing down over the heads of the audience with sharp and piercing eyes, that seemed to take in every detail. He looked to be a foreigner, an Italian, most likely.

"Some count or marquis," thought Larry as he looked at the man's decoration, noting that it was a foreign one. "It's queer how they like to tog themselves out in ribbons and such things."

The young reporter was about to return to his seat with the programs when he noticed two young Italians in one of the rear rows of the hall. They had turned, and were gazing at the large man in the dress suit. Most of the men in the audience were similarly attired, but the two Italians in the rear, though well dressed, did not have on the clothes that fashion has decreed for such affairs.

It was, therefore, somewhat to Larry's surprise, that he saw the evidently titled and cultured foreigner make an unmistakable signal to the two men. The big man raised his right hand to his right cheeks, with the fingers and thumb spread out. He held it there a moment, and, taking it away, brought it back again, as though to indicate the numeral ten.

As Larry watched, he saw the taller of the two

men hold up one finger. Apparently satisfied, the big man turned aside, and approached an usher.

"At what time does Madame Androletti make her appearance to-night?" he asked, with a foreign accent.

"At nine, first, and then at ten," was the answer, and Larry was at once struck with the answer. The singer came on at ten, and ten was the numeral the big man had signaled to the others. What could it mean? Larry wondered.

"Very good," answered the foreigner, as he turned aside, and went out into the lobby, with a hasty glance toward the two in the rear seats. Larry saw them both nod their heads.

"Well, I don't know that it concerns me," mused the young reporter, as he returned to his seat. "It looks rather odd, but I guess I've got so that I'm looking for mysteries in everything. I've got to get out of the habit."

He looked at the program, after handing Molly one, and noted that the cause for the long wait between the two appearances of the singer was because of a heavy orchestral number coming in between her first and second selections. After that she was to sing several songs in succession.

"I'm going to watch when she comes on at ten," said Larry to himself.

The concert soon began, with an overture, and Larry found himself enjoying it, even though he knew little about classical harmony. Molly was in raptures, for she had a natural taste for music

that Larry lacked, and she had taken a number of piano lessons.

"It's grand!" she whispered to him.

Madame Androletti came on for her first number, being loudly applauded. Larry made some notes, that he might give Mr. Rosberg an intelligent account of the affair, and then gave himself up to the rapture of the music.

The orchestral number followed, and then, as the hour of ten approached, Larry found himself wondering what would happen. The musicians tuned their instruments for what was to be one of the chief vocal numbers, and there was a hush of expectancy.

The curtains and draperies parted and Madame Androletti came on again, bowing with pleasure at the applause. Larry found himself watching her curiously. Then he turned and cast a hasty glance to where the two strange men had been seated. They had left the hall.

"That's strange," mused Larry, and then turned back, for the singer was beginning her song, her exquisite voice filling the big auditorium.

She had not sung half a dozen words, throwing into them all the dramatic force of which she was capable, before Larry, who was watching her closely, saw a strange change come over her.

She stepped back, evidently in fear, and then her hands went up over her eyes, as though to shut out some terrifying sight. At first the au-

dience thought it was all part of her acting—though the song did not call for that sort of stage “business.”

A moment later, however, showed the mistake. For Madame Androletti ceased singing, and the strains of the orchestra came to an end with a sudden crash.

The singer cried out something in Italian. What it was Larry did not know, but he could tell, by her tones, that she was frightened.

An instant later she swayed, and she would have fallen to the stage had not her maid and her manager sprung from the wings and caught her.

“Curtain!” Larry heard the manager call quickly, and the big sheet of asbestos slid slowly down. The audience was in an uproar, though a subdued one, and there was no sign of panic.

“She’s fainted!” was whispered on all sides.

Before the curtain was fully down Larry looked under it, and he had a glimpse of the eyes of the stricken singer peering out. And there was fright in them—deadly fright.

Like a flash Larry turned and looked back of him, for it was at some distant point in the hall that Madame Androletti was gazing.

The young reporter saw, standing at the head of an aisle that led directly to the center of the stage, the decorated foreigner who had signaled to the two men the hour of ten. And it was but a little past that now.

This man stood there in plain view, his eyes

fixed on the slowly falling curtain that was hiding the frightened singer from view, and on his face was a mocking smile. Then he turned and walked slowly from the place. No one but Larry seemed to have noted him, as the eyes of all others were turned on the stage.

"Oh, what was it?" gasped Molly Mason, clinging to Larry's arm. "Something has happened! She must be ill!"

"I think she has fainted," said a lady sitting next to Larry's companion. "Singers often do so from stress of emotion, or from the heat and strain. She has only fainted. She will probably be all right in a little while."

The orchestra, in answer to a signal from the conductor had swung into a gay number. The curtain had fallen, concealing what was going on behind it.

"It was a faint—just a faint," every one was saying.

But Larry Dexter thought:

"It was more than a faint. If ever there was deadly fear on a woman's face, it was on hers. There's something going on here that the audience knows nothing about, and I'm going to have a try at it. That big man, and those two others are in it, too, I'll wager. Maybe I've stumbled on something more than just an assignment to cover a concert."

After events were soon to prove Larry Dexter was right.

CHAPTER II

LARRY SCENTS A MYSTERY

"MADAME ANDROLETTI craves the indulgence of the audience for but a few moments. She is indisposed, but will resume her singing directly."

Thus announced her manager, a few minutes after the fall of the curtain, when the orchestra had been quieted by his upraised hand. Applause followed his little address.

"Oh, I'm so glad it didn't amount to anything," said Miss Mason to Larry. "She is such a beautiful singer that I shouldn't want to miss hearing her. And I might never get the opportunity again. Isn't it nice that it isn't really anything?"

"Yes," assented Larry, but he was far from feeling that it amounted to nothing. The young reporter was doing some hard thinking.

"There may be a big thing back of this, and again it may amount to nothing," he reasoned with himself. "I'm inclined to think, though, that there's something doing. Now how am I to set about getting it?"

"I guess I'll sit tight for a while and see what develops. If I go to making inquiries now some

of the other newspapermen will get 'wise,' and I'll lose any chances of a 'beat,' if there's one in it. I'll saw wood for a while."

The orchestra resumed the playing of a spirited air, and while the audience is waiting for the singer to recover, I will take this chance to tell you, my new readers, something more about Larry Dexter, the young reporter.

Larry had come to New York some years before, a farm boy, with an ambition to become a newspaper man. In the first book of this series, entitled "From Office Boy to Reporter; or, The First Step in Journalism," I told how Larry accomplished this, but not without hard work, and he was in no little danger, because of the mean actions of Peter Manton, a rival copy boy on another paper, the *Scorcher*. But Larry won out.

In the second book, entitled "Larry Dexter, the Young Reporter," an account is given of Larry's "assignments," or the particular pieces of newspaper work set aside for him. Some of them were very strange, and not a few of them dangerous. Larry had a number of startling adventures in getting big "beats," or exclusive pieces of news.

His mother, with whom Larry lived, was often worried about him, but Larry had to support her, as well as his sisters, Mary and Lucy, and his little brother James, so he did not give up because his work was hard.

Deserved success came to Larry, and he made considerable money, for he discovered deeds to some land that his mother had a right to, but which was being kept from her, and he managed to get possession of the real estate.

Larry came into real prominence in the newspaper world when he made his successful search for Mr. Hampton Potter, the millionaire, as related in the book called "Larry Dexter's Great Search."

In that volume are given the details of why Mr. Potter disappeared, and how the young reporter found him, after a long hunt, in which he ran many dangers. During the time he worked on this case Larry and Miss Grace Potter, the millionaire's daughter, became good friends.

When the Consolidated National Bank was robbed of a million dollars one day, all Wall Street was astounded. An endeavor was made to keep the robbery secret for a time, but Larry, with the help of Mr. Potter, got the story and secured a "scoop," or "beat."

Then he began to solve the bank mystery, for it was a mystery as to where the million had gone. In the volume entitled "Larry Dexter and the Bank Mystery," I give the details of how our hero solved the mystery, got back the million, and secured the arrest of the thief. He did not do this easily, however, and for a long time he was on the wrong "trail."

The solving of this mystery added further to

Larry's fame, and he was more than ever the "star," or chief reporter, on the *Leader*, where he had first obtained his start in journalism, and where he preferred to remain, though other papers made him handsome offers.

And now Larry was covering an ordinary concert to oblige a fellow scribe.

"But, unless I'm greatly mistaken," mused Larry, as the orchestra played on, "this is going to be something more than an ordinary concert. Of course all the other papers will have the story about Madame Androletti fainting in the middle of her song, but I don't believe they'll find out why she did.

"I believe it was because she saw that man, though why the sight of him should affect her so is a mystery. That's where I've got to begin; at that man with the foreign decoration. I don't believe many people noticed him staring at her under the curtain. They were all too intent on the singer herself."

Larry was doing some hard thinking.

"Oh, isn't that wonderful—that music?" whispered Miss Mason to him.

"What's that? Oh, yes, it's fine!" answered Larry dreamily.

"I don't believe you even heard it," she went on, as the wonderful melody rose and fell. "You act just as you did lots of times when you came to see me the time you were working on the bank mystery."

"Well, I feel almost that same way," spoke Larry with a smile.

"Do you mean to say there's a mystery here, Larry Dexter?" she asked in a tense whisper. "If there is——"

"Hush," begged Larry, as the orchestral number came to an end. "Let's see if she comes out now. I'll tell you about it later. I may need your help."

Oh, fine!" she whispered, with sparkling eyes.

As I have said, Molly Mason had aided Larry in solving the bank mystery, for it was of her that the thief had purchased the valise which he used to hold the million dollars, and Molly gave Larry a valuable clew.

The final chords of the music died away, and there was a hush of expectancy. Would the noted singer be able to go on? Or was her indisposition too much to allow her to do so? Every one waited anxiously for some announcement from behind that big curtain. And Larry looked eagerly toward the stage.

He had made up his mind that he would try to see Madame Androletti after the concert, and ask her what had frightened her. True, she might not tell him, but Larry was too good a newspaperman to mind a refusal. And he had his own way of getting news.

The young reporter looked about the hall. He wanted to see if the big man, with the foreign decoration, was again present. But, if he was,

our hero failed to get a glimpse of him. Nor could he see the two more ordinarily dressed men who had answered the man's signal.

"Well, this looks as if something was doing," said Larry to himself, as there was a movement behind the curtain. A murmur ran through the audience as the manager again stepped before the footlights.

"Oh, I do hope she can sing," whispered Miss Mason. "I wouldn't miss it for anything! Oh, what a strain public performers must be under, to have to appear when they are not able."

"It's part of the game," murmured Larry, narrowly watching the manager.

The latter began to speak.

"I am glad to be able to inform you," he said, "that Madame Androletti has somewhat recovered from her indisposition, and will be able to continue. She craves your indulgence, however, if she is not just exactly in voice, but she will do her best."

Applause interrupted him.

"Madame Androletti will omit the number she was singing when she fainted," the conductor went on, "as it might have a bad effect on her nerves. She will substitute another," and he named it, Larry making a note for the benefit of the musical critic whose place he was temporarily filling.

The manager bowed, there was more applause, and then the singer herself appeared. The ap-

plause burst out into a great volume of sound, for the audience recognized the pluck it took to come back when physically indisposed, and they appreciated what Madame Androletti was doing.

She bowed and smiled, and signaled for the orchestra to begin.

As the first notes of the accompaniment music burst out Larry noticed that the singer cast a glance around the big hall, and even up into the galleries.

"She's looking for that man," thought the young reporter. "What strange influence has he over her? What's the mystery I'm just on the edge of, I wonder?"

Madame Androletti began to sing, and as the first few notes rippled out she cast a quick glance into the wings. Few noticed it, but Larry did, and as his eyes followed hers he saw a boy, of about ten years of age, standing behind a representation of a tree trunk, part of the stage-setting. He was a boy with dark, curling hair, an Italian, evidently, as was the singer. Larry at once jumped to a conclusion.

"That's Madame Androletti's boy!" he thought, and the look of love that was on the singer's face as she glanced toward the youngster seemed to confirm this.

"By Jove! I believe I'm on the track!" thought Larry Dexter, as he saw the boy move out of sight.

CHAPTER III

A STOLEN BOY

"DOESN'T she sing wonderfully?" whispered Miss Mason to Larry.

"Yes," he answered, but it was plain that his thoughts were on something else besides the music. He was narrowly watching the singer, occasionally casting glances into the wings, or the scenery at either side of the stage. He was watching for another sight of the boy, who looked so much like Madame Androletti.

The concert went on, and it seemed that nothing more out of the ordinary was to happen. The orchestra played its numbers to perfection, as nearly as Larry could tell, and, as for the singing, he made up his mind that he would report to Mr. Rosberg that it was "slick."

Larry was not very well "up," on musical terms, but he knew that the *Leader* was not paying him as a musical critic, and he did not worry.

"Anyhow, there'll be a good story in how she collapsed in the middle of a song, whether the report of the concert is good or not," mused Larry.

Madame Androletti came on several times, and sang as encores a number of songs not down on the program. She seemed to be in unusually good spirits, and was roundly applauded. Not a trace of her former indisposition was noticeable.

"I'll have to wait a bit after the concert is over," Larry whispered to his companion, during a pause in the program.

"Why?" she asked.

"I want to get an interview with Madame Androletti, and I've got to ask the orchestra leader what those extra numbers were."

"I can do that for you," offered Molly readily. "I know some of them, as it is, and I can easily get the names of the others."

"Will you?" he asked eagerly. "That'll be fine! Then we won't have to wait so long. Are you sure you won't mind?"

"Not a bit," she replied, with a smile. "I fancy I would like to be a reporter."

"You'd make a better one than lots of 'em who imagine they're journalists," said Larry.

The concert was nearing an end. Madame Androletti had sung her last number with great success, and had retired, bowing her thanks for the frantic applause. The curtain started down, and Larry watched it.

Suddenly he became aware that something unusual was taking place behind it. He had a glimpse of the lower part of the singer's dress, which he could easily distinguish under the cur-

tain. She was the only lady in view among a number of gentlemen, who had also taken part in the program. And Larry was sure he saw the singer running across the stage as fast as she could go, with gentlemen trailing after her. Of the latter Larry could only see their legs from their knees down. The curtain was almost on the stage.

The playing of the orchestra drowned any noise that might have otherwise been heard. Larry looked around. The audience was leaving. No one seemed to be paying any attention to the stage, not even the musicians, who were down too low to see under the curtain, in any event.

Larry noted, with satisfaction, that a number of reporters for other papers, whom he had seen earlier in the evening, had gone. They had not stayed to the finish.

"And maybe here's where I beat 'em!" thought Larry grimly.

He looked about for a sight of the big decorated foreigner, or his confederates, as the young reporter called them, but none was in sight.

"I'm going back of the scenes," Larry whispered to Molly. "You just ask the orchestra leader the names of the extra numbers. Say you're from the *Leader*, and it will be all right. I'll be back as soon as I can. Wait in the lobby for me."

With that the young reporter left his seat, and, crossing through an empty row of orchestra

chairs, he made his way to a lower box, whence he could get behind the curtain.

Larry boldly pushed his way in. He was used to doing that. Besides, at this time, there was no one to stop him. He found himself on an almost deserted stage. It was brilliantly lighted, for scene-shifters were at work, putting away the setting just used, and bringing out another that was to come into play for the next performance the following afternoon.

No one seemed to pay any attention to the young reporter. He knew the general location of the dressing-rooms, and started toward them, intending to ask the first door-tender he saw for Madame Androletti. He was dimly aware of some confusion in the left wings, but he could see nothing.

"That's the place for me!" thought Larry, hurrying on.

He had crossed the stage, and was pressing ahead, when some one hailed him.

"Hey, young feller, where you goin'?"

"Back here," answered Larry, non-committally.

"Where's that?"

"To see Madame Androletti."

"Got a pass? Got any authority?"

Larry took a quick resolve.

"I'm from the *Leader*!" he exclaimed. "I want to see Madame Androletti. I covered the concert to-night. It was great. There's my card. See you later — appointment — important — she

"wants to see me!" murmured Larry, quickly, as he hurried on, thrusting a bit of pasteboard into the man's hand.

"Wants to see you, eh?" murmured the man.

"Yes," called back Larry, now some distance away. The young reporter little realized how true his hastily-spoken words would prove to be.

The young newspaper reporter pushed on. He was amid a confusion of scenery now. Tree stumps, castle walls, the ceilings of rooms, a pair of stairs, an arbor covered with trailing vines—the various things used to set the stage. He threaded in and out among them.

A man in a dress suit confronted him, a man whom Larry at once recognized as Madame Androletti's manager.

"Who are you? What do you want?" the manager asked suspiciously.

Larry realized that he could not bluff this man.

"I'm from the *Leader*," said the young reporter quickly. "My card," and he extended one. "What's the matter? I'm sure something is wrong. I've got to have the story. Why did Madame Androletti faint? What's up now?"

The manager glanced at Larry's card.

"Ah, from the *Leader*, eh? Well, your paper has been very kind to us. I will tell you, though I do not usually see the need of sensationalism. However, there is none here. As you may perhaps know, Madame Androletti, whom I have the honor of representing, personally, travels about

with her young son, Lorenzo. He is her only child, and, since the death of his father, he has been *en tour* with his mother. He is always somewhere on the stage when she sings.

"She is very nervous about him, and just now, after her final number, she missed him. She feared he might have strayed away, and been hurt, and she called out. That raised a little alarm, and, as we all know how devoted she is to him, we all began a search for the lad."

The manager, who was Señor Maurice Cotta, paused.

"Did you find him?" asked Larry.

"His mother did," was the answer of Señor Cotta. "He was in her dressing-room, I believe. She is close at hand. Hark, I think I can hear her talking to him now."

He held up a fat, pudgy hand. Larry listened. Plainly enough he could hear a woman's voice murmuring:

"My son! My boy! My little Lorenzo!" Then followed something in Italian.

"So, you see, there is no story for you, Señor *Leader*—I beg your pardon—Dexter," spoke the manager, with a smile. "I am sorry, but you will have only to write about our concert."

"And about Madame Androletti fainting," added Larry, feeling rather disappointed, as all true newspaper men do at a story not "panning out." It is not through heartlessness that they

are thus regretful, but because it is their profession to hunt out news.

"Oh, yes, her indisposition," murmured Señor Cotta.

"It was plucky of her to keep on," said Larry. "I'll have a good story of it."

"Ah, thank you."

"Perhaps I could see her, and ask her if she is all right again," proposed Larry. "A little interview——"

"Ah, exactly!" exclaimed the manager, not at all unwilling to get all the press notices he could for the prima donna he was managing. "This way, I'll point out her room. She will see you."

He left Larry at the door of the dressing-room. It was not the first time our hero had interviewed stage people in their rooms. As he paused, before knocking, he heard the murmuring voice again.

"Ah, my Lorenzo! My little Lorenzo!"

Larry was at once impressed by two things. One was that there was no answering tones of a boy's voice, and the other was that there was, in the notes of Madame Androletti, extreme anguish. It was not as though she was speaking to her son, but, rather, lamenting him. Larry grew suddenly suspicious.

He knocked on the door. There was a moment of silence, and then a strained voice answered:

"Who is there? Go away! I can see no one!"

Larry resolved on a sudden plan. He was

going to do a daring thing. There was no other person in sight.

"Madame Androletti!" he called, with his lips close to the portal. "I am a reporter from the *Leader*. I was at your concert to-night. I saw the man with the foreign decoration. I saw his two confederates. I may be able to help you find your son."

The door was fairly flung open. The singer, with tears in her eyes, confronted the young reporter.

"What is that?" she whispered hoarsely. "You can find my boy? My Lorenzo—my little boy? Oh, don't play with me! Who are you? How do you know my boy is gone? Oh, but he is! Why should I try to hide it? He is gone—stolen! Oh, can you help me?" and she held out her hands to Larry with a dramatic gesture.

He had guessed better than he dared to hope. The boy was missing, after all. And she had given the impression to every one else in the theater that he was safe with her! What mystery was here?

CHAPTER IV

LARRY'S NEW ASSIGNMENT

LARRY stepped into the singer's dressing-room. She was still attired as she had been on the stage. Her hair was disheveled, and there were traces of tears on her beautiful face.

As the young reporter entered, a woman came from an inner room, and said something in Italian to the singer. The latter answered her in the same language, and then, turning to Larry, said:

"This is my maid, my faithful Goegi. She alone, besides myself, knows that Lorenzo has been taken away—that is except yourself, Señor, and—and the scoundrels who have taken him. Oh, if you know where he is, speak quickly! End my suspense!"

She had closed the door, so that her anguished words might not penetrate to the regions outside of her room, and she gazed tearfully at Larry.

"I did not say I knew where he was," the young reporter replied gently. "But perhaps I can find him for you. I have worked on several mystery cases, including those of missing persons. I real-

ized that something was wrong here, almost as soon as you fainted, and so I made up my mind to see you. Why did you let it be known that your son was with you, when he was not?" asked Larry, for a glimpse around the room showed no signs of the boy. There were several pictures of him, however, and Larry easily recognized in them the little lad he had seen standing in the wings.

"Why did I, señor? Because there has been a great crime committed, a crime of cunning and daring, and I must meet cunning and daring with the same weapons. It is no time for force. I realize that. Neither would it have done any good to have started a pursuit at once. The villains are too cute for that.

"So it was that I might have time to think—time to plan—that I dissembled. I pretended that Lorenzo was in my room when he was not. I did not want them all in here. So I pretended. But you—you discovered my secret. Now, can you help me find my boy? Will you? I do not know you, I have never seen you before, and yet from your face I see that I can trust you. And also you reporters—you are so resourceful. Every day I read of the marvelous things you do. In my country it is not so. But, oh, these wonderful United States! Perhaps you can help me. Will you?"

Once more she held out her hands in a mute appeal.

"I will if I can!" exclaimed Larry. "I'll do all in my power. Listen! I'm a newspaper man, first of all, and though I want to help you, it is only through the power of the press that I can. I ask no reward, only that you let my paper—the *Leader*—have this news first, exclusively. I'm glad now that you did not raise an alarm. It makes it possible for me to get a 'beat.' Tell me all you wish to about the case. Then I'll get busy."

"Oh, it is such a long story, I cannot tell half of it now. Sufficient to say that there are enemies of my dead husband who seek to injure me through my only son. They have often sought to get possession of him, but I have foiled them by keeping him close to me always. But this time I failed. Oh, Lorenzo! My poor Lorenzo! where are you?"

She was overcome with emotion for a moment, but soon resumed her story.

"I had been warned," she said, "but I did not heed. To-night, when I saw that man—my enemy—I was filled with fear. I fainted, and when I was myself again I looked for Lorenzo. He was safe, and I asked him to stand in sight, in the wings, during the rest of the concert. Only by such means would I know he was safe. He did so, and all went well, until the end.

"Then, after my last number, I looked for him. I did not see him. I cried out! I ran! The others were alarmed. They asked me what was

the matter. I did not tell them all I feared. I said I thought Lorenzo might have fallen down some trap-door, or have stumbled over some scenery—anything to keep the truth back for a time.”

“Why?” asked Larry curiously.

“Because I realized that if I gave an alarm at once, and took after the scoundrels, they might—they might injure my son. There was but one thing to do—meet cunning with cunning—and I took that way.

“When many of my friends, and the stage hands, were looking for my boy, I rushed to my dressing-room, and called out that he was here. Then I shut the door, and told Goegi to keep my secret until I could make my plans.

“And then you—you—a reporter came along—and you have it at your fingers’ ends. I do not understand. How did you know so much?”

“I guessed it,” replied Larry. “We newspaper men have to guess at a lot, and sometimes we hit it. But how long has he been missing? Where did he go? Who took him? Which way did he go? Did any one see him taken away?”

“Oh, what a lot of questions!” cried the singer, and she smiled the least bit through her tears. “I can not answer them all, but I will do my best. I saw Lorenzo standing in the wings when my last song was almost finished. When I looked again he was gone.”

“But some one must have seen him,” insisted

Larry. "There were a lot of people back of the scenes, and they must have noticed him. Did the stage-doorkeeper see him go out?"

"I do not know. I have not asked. Listen. It is necessary to be secret about this at present. I do not want any publicity."

"But I can't help you without publicity," insisted Larry. "That's my business. I'm a newspaper reporter. I want the story."

"Yes! Yes!" exclaimed the singer. "I understand. Let me think!"

She paced rapidly up and down the room. Then she exclaimed:

"I have it. Yours is an afternoon paper, is it not?"

"Yes."

"And you want—oh, such a funny language—you want a carrot?"

"No, a 'beat,'" explained Larry, with a smile. "An exclusive story—I want to 'beat'—get ahead of—all the other papers."

"I see. Well, I will help you. It may be that my son was taken away to but, temporarily, frighten me—to bring me to terms. In that case he will be brought back to me soon—by tomorrow morning, or I will hear from those who have him. Now, then, if I do not hear, then you may print the story, and I will see no one but you until after it comes out. After that—when the world knows—I am afraid many reporters will——"

"Of course they will!" cried Larry. "You'll be overwhelmed with them, but the more publicity you have the better for you. You'll have every one in these United States on the lookout for your boy. Newspapers help a lot. All I want is the first story, and after that the others can come in."

"All right. I agree to your plan. It's a good one. But do you know who that man with the decoration was? He is Señor Delcato Parloti, a plotter, and schemer, and the enemy of my late husband. Oh, how I fear him!"

"And those other two men—to whom he signaled?"

"I do not know them—perhaps his aids. Oh, this is terrible!" and once more she gave way to her grief.

Presently she mastered herself again, and resumed:

"I have friends—powerful friends, and I will set them quietly on the trail of this Parloti. If I do not have word with him by morning, or if I do not hear from him, then I will send for you, and you may have the story.

"In fact, you may have the story anyhow, for in one case it will be about the return of my son to me, and in the other——"

She could not finish, but Larry knew what she meant.

Rapidly he asked a few more questions, until he had more of the story. With what would be

told him later, he knew he would have a startling article for the *Leader*.

Bidding the singer good-by, and promising to keep her secret until the time for publicity came, Larry took his leave, agreeing to hold himself in readiness for her summons the next morning.

As the young reporter left the dressing-room he saw no signs of excitement on the now almost deserted stage. Clearly all the others had accepted Madame Androletti's innocent deception, practiced to bring about the return of her son.

"But I don't see how she's going to get out of the theater without letting some one see that the boy isn't with her," thought Larry. "That'll be sure to bring up questions. However, she may be actress enough to carry it off with the aid of her maid. Say, but I'm on the track of a big story, all right!"

A few minutes later he joined Molly Mason in the lobby.

"Did I keep you waiting too long?" he asked.

"Oh, no, I enjoyed it! I don't mean that!" she exclaimed, with a blush at Larry's queer look. "I don't mean that I enjoyed your absence. But I was talking music to the leader of the orchestra. He gave me all the information you wanted. I wrote it on this program for you."

"Thanks! You're getting to be quite a reporter!" said Larry with a smile. "And now for home!" he added as he summoned the taxicab.

"Oh, but did you get your story?" she asked.

"Part of it," replied Larry. "I'm hoping for more. It may be a big one."

Then he turned the subject to the concert proper, and they talked of that until the girl's home was reached.

"Thank you for a lovely time," she whispered.

"You're welcome," replied Larry, and he thought to himself that, after all, perhaps his substituting for the musical critic might lead to big results.

Late as it was he called up Mr. Emborg, the city editor, at his home, and gave an inkling of what was in the wind.

"Come right over here, Larry," commanded his chief, and soon the two were in consultation.

"So you'll get a story out of it, no matter which way it goes," commented Mr. Emborg, when Larry had told him the facts.

"It looks so. I've got to wait until morning, though."

"All right. Be ready to jump right out on this. As I see it, even if she gets the stolen boy back, we'll have a two or three days' yarn out of it. So you drop everything else, Larry, and take this new assignment."

"And if the boy isn't returned?"

"Then it's your assignment to find him. You solved the bank mystery, and that about Mr. Potter, so try your hand at this."

As Larry went home, after leaving the city

editor, he had a feeling that all the hard assignments were coming his way.

"But I like it!" he exclaimed, half aloud. "And I'll do my best to locate that little chap. I wonder why there are such men as kidnappers in the world?"

Larry looked eagerly over the morning papers. Though all of them had a story about the temporary indisposition of the talented singer, none of them had the real account.

"Now for a 'beat'!" cried Larry to himself.

The telephone rang.

"Mr. Dexter!" sang out the boy whose duty it was to answer it. "You're wanted."

Larry sprang to the instrument, and, as he did so he heard a voice saying:

"This is Madame Androletti! Come as quickly as you can!"

CHAPTER V

SCOOPING THE "SCORCHER"

THE start which Larry gave when he heard the voice of the prima donna over the telephone was noticed by the city editor.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Emberg, slipping to Larry's side, just as the young reporter was telling Madame Androletti over the wire that he would call on her at once.

"It's the stolen boy case!" he answered, when he had hung up the receiver. "He can't have come back, and she can't have had any trace of him, for she was half crying when she told me to come up. I'm going to get the story. It's ripe now, and it's a good one. There's something big back of it all."

"That's the way to talk, Larry. Get right after it! Can you get a 'scoop' out of it?"

"I'm going to try hard. None of the other papers are on to it yet."

"Look out that the *Scorcher* doesn't spring some fake sensation on you. This is just their kind of a yarn. Beat 'em if you can."

"I will," and with that Larry hurried out to

catch the elevator. Mr. Emborg stepped out into the corridor with him.

"There are some queer points to this story, Larry," he said. "I can't understand why Madame Androletti shouldn't have raised an alarm at once when she found her son missing."

"It does seem odd," agreed the young reporter. "And yet she explains that by saying that the case was so peculiar that if she went out and made a big fuss, and called in the police, the kidnappers might do her, or her son, some harm. It's just like when some one does something mean to you, and you pretend not to know it for a while, laying low, and holding back, so as to get a better chance to get even with 'em."

"I see," agreed the city editor, with a laugh at Larry's boyish explanation. "And yet the kidnappers must know that Madame Androletti is aware that her son has been spirited away."

"Of course. And yet if she continues to act quietly, as she has done, it may make them curious to find out what her game is, and they may not carry out their original plan, whatever it is. Then, too, there's no doubt but what this is done for a ransom, and sooner or later an offer will come from the fellows who have the boy, stating how much they want to return him."

"I suppose so. There ought to be a heavier punishment for kidnapping than at present. Well, get along, Larry."

The young reporter lost no time in reaching the

apartments of the singer. She had several rooms in a large hotel, on Murray Hill, New York, where she and her maid stayed. Up to the time he was taken away from the theater, her son had also been there.

Larry found Madame Androletti in tears, but she soon composed herself, and began to tell her story.

"I have heard something about you, since I met you last night," she said, by way of preface.

"Nothing unpleasant, I hope," spoke Larry.

"On the contrary, good. I was talking with my maid about you. She has been in this country some time, and she reads much of your papers. You are the reporter, are you not, who solved the Wall Street bank mystery?"

"Yes, I was lucky enough to do that," replied Larry.

"And you also searched for and found Mr. Potter, the missing millionaire. Ah, I have sung at his charming house."

"Yes, I located him," said Larry. "But——"

"Ah, you are too modest!" she interrupted. "But I was glad to know this, for after two such celebrated cases I feel sure that you can find my son."

"I'm going to do my best, Madame Androletti, if I have to trace him clear across the continent. But, if you please, I'd like to hear the particulars about him, and who this man is—the man with the

foreign decoration—who probably took him away."

"Ah, he is a villain, a bad-hearted man!" the singer exclaimed. "I will tell you."

She then stated briefly, that Delcato Parlotti, at the sight of whom in the theater she had fainted, was a distant relative of her late husband.

"My husband, who lived near Rome, Italy, was a very rich man," she went on, "and had he not married me, all his estate at his death would have passed to Parlotti and others. But after our marriage, of course, I was the one who would inherit the property, and this left Parlotti nothing but what he had of his own—he had no expectation of a fortune. This made him very bitter against my husband and myself.

"Lorenzo is my only child, and when my husband died, about three years ago, this Parlotti at once began to persecute me. He did all in his power to get my fortune away from me, and at last began to threaten me through my son. That made me very much afraid, and I fled from Italy to this country. I thought I would be safe.

"Parlotti sent me a message not long ago. He said if I would not sign over to him all my rights in the property my husband had left, my son would be taken from me. But the cruel part of it is that, under the law, I can not sign away those rights. They fall to my son. It is quite complicated, and I do not understand it. Gladly would I give up all my husband left, retaining only such a

modest fortune as I have in my own right, to save my son, but I cannot—cannot, under the law sign away those rights, and this bad man will not believe it. He insists that I give him the fortune, or he will take my son until I do.

“So, as I said, I fled from Italy. I hoped I would be safe, and for some years I have been. Then, when I think all is well, that man last night walked into the hall where I was singing. Do you wonder I faint, señor?”

“No, indeed!” exclaimed Larry, who had been making rapid notes of the story, with names, dates and other details that I have omitted here.

“And so they took my boy!” cried the singer. “They have stolen him from me! But with your help, good Señor Dexter, you who solved the million-dollar bank mystery, we will get him back, will we not?”

“We will!” cried Larry enthusiastically, though he knew that there was plenty of hard work ahead of him, and but a slim chance that he would be successful.

“I’ll do all I can,” he said, “and so will every one on the *Leader*. You’ll have all the help the newspaper can give.”

“Oh, how can I reward you?” she cried. “My fortune——”

“All the reward I ask is to have the story alone—exclusively!” cried Larry. “I want a ‘scoop’.”

“Oh, you reporters! Such funny words! First,

you want a cabbage is it——?" and she looked at Larry, and smiled.

"No, a 'beat,' " he corrected.

"Oh, yes. And then you demand what you call a—shovel——"

"No, a 'scoop.' I guess it means shoveling all the other fellows out of the way, though," explained the young reporter. "But if I get either a 'beat,' or a 'scoop,' it's all the same. Now I'm off to the office, to write this story, and then I'll come back and make some plans. I want to know more about this Parlotti. If any reporters from other papers come to see you, please——"

He was interrupted by the ringing of the private telephone in the singer's room. She answered it, repeating some of the message that came to her.

"A Mr. Peter Manton to see me," she said aloud. "But I know no Señor Manton. Tell him——"

In a flash Larry was at her side.

"That's another reporter," he whispered. "My rival. He's on the *Scorcher*. Don't give him the story."

"What shall I do? If I do not see him, he may print some terribly untrue story, and——"

"That's just what the *Scorcher* would be likely to do, anyhow," agreed Larry, though Pete isn't such a bad sort himself. Let me think. I'll tell you. Can't you fool him in some way? Sort of string him along until I get away, and have my

story in the first edition of the *Leader*. Then I don't care what he prints."

"Yes, yes! I see. You mean to 'scoop' him!"

"That's it."

"And I will help you!" The singer was excited now, and she was more like herself, a great actress. "I will fool him! I and Goegi, my maid. We will change places. She shall be the mistress, and I the maid. Remember, Goegi, you are the singer, and I am your attendant. And you speak no English. Do not forget that. I will have to translate what you say to this reporter. We will see him up here, when Señor Dexter has gone. Is it not so?" she asked, turning to Larry.

"Fine!" he cried. "That ought to fool him all right. I'll hurry in now. Detain him as long as you can. It will be some little while until we can get out an extra on this."

"I will see Señor Manton in a few minutes," spoke Madame Androletti over the wire, which she had held open.

Larry hurried out of the room, going down in the servant's elevator, to avoid landing in the hotel lobby, and so meeting his old rival, Peter Manton.

"I guess I've 'scooped' the *Scorcher*," thought our hero, as he hastened toward his office with the big story all ready to write.

CHAPTER VI

A VISIT TO SEÑOR PARLOTI

LARRY heard afterward what happened to Peter. The reporter for the *Scorcher*, after waiting impatiently for some time in the hotel corridor, was shown up to the singer's room. Then came another wait.

Madame Androletti, attired as her maid, came out and announced that the "singer" would see him soon.

"But I can't wait!" insisted Peter. "I'm in a big hurry. I have a tip that Madame Androletti's son is ill, or something, and I want a story about it."

"The Madame will see you at once!" exclaimed the pretended maid, with a smile. In spite of the fact that her heart was torn with anguish at the loss of her son, the singer was enough of an actress to carry out the rôle she had assumed for Larry's sake.

There was another wait, while Madame Androletti pretended to go and confer with her mistress in another room.

"Oh, this delay is fierce!" exclaimed Peter,

who, on looking at his watch, saw that it was nearly first edition time. "I'll never get the story in time for the paper. And I'll wager that Larry Dexter is after it, too. I want to beat him!"

Another wait, and then, thinking that this part of the game had been carried far enough, Goegi came in. Attired in the garments of her mistress, and with a veil over her face, the disguise was sufficiently good to deceive Peter.

"Now for the story!" he cried. "Where is your son, madame?" he demanded. "I understand that something has happened to him."

And now another source of delay developed. It appeared that the pretended singer could not speak English, and the real singer translated to her maid what Peter had asked, and also her replies. This took more time.

"The story! The story!" insisted Peter, walking up and down the room in his excitement. "What about the boy?"

"What has the señor heard, and where?" asked the maid, which question was duly translated, the inquiry of the real singer having been made in Italian.

"Oh, what has that got to do with it?" demanded the representative of the *Scorcher*, but he condescended to state that he had called casually at the theater to learn if Madame Androletti would give the remainder of her performances for the week. There some stage hand, who had heard the excitement of the night before, had hinted

that something was wrong with the singer's son. Like any good newspaper man, Peter had followed this up with a visit to Madame Androletti. He had, however, not the least inkling of what the real story was.

And then began a battle of wits. On his part, by skilful questioning, Peter endeavored to find out what was at the bottom of the affair. On the part of the singer and her maid, to be loyal to Larry, they tangled matters up as much as they could, by reason of two languages being used. They were fighting for delay, and when, finally, Peter did get a glimmer of the truth it was too late for his first edition.

All he knew, when he finally rushed away from the singer's room, was that her son had mysteriously disappeared, whether kidnapped or not, Madame Androletti would not say positively.

"I'm going to telephone that in," decided Peter. "It will make a scare head for the *Scorcher*."

He got his city editor on the wire.

"I've got a great story!" exclaimed Peter. "It's about that Italian singer and her son. It's a peach!"

"Too late!" said the city editor briefly.

"Too late?" gasped Peter. "Why?"

"Because the *Leader* is just on the street with the whole yarn, double-leaded, and with scare heads. You're 'scooped,' Peter! Come on in and

fix up something to cover us, but we're beaten to a frazzle."

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" exclaimed Larry's rival, as he hung up the telephone receiver. "They fooled me! This is another one you've put over on me, Larry Dexter!"

But Larry had other thing to think of, now that he had secured his coveted "scoop." One of them was to provide for a "follow," or secondary story, and the other was to get on the trail of the men who had spirited the little lad away.

"For there was more than one in this game," decided Larry.

He thought of the big, well-dressed man, with the foreign decoration on his coat, and the two rather poorly-dressed individuals in the back of the hall to whom the other had signaled.

"I think those three are in it," decided the young reporter, "and I've got to get some clues that will lead me to them. What had I better do first?"

A moment's thought told him that the best source of information was Madame Androletti herself.

"She may know where to start to look for this Parloti," reasoned Larry. "I want to see him first. He is the leader in this business, I'm sure."

"Did you get your turnip?" asked the singer of the young reporter, when she received him again, a few hours later.

Larry looked puzzled, until the maid, who had

now assumed her real character, and did something in a low voice in Italian to her mistress.

"Oh, I mean your 'beat'!" exclaimed Madame Androletti. "I never can seem to think of the right name of the vegetable. But did you get it?"

"Yes, thank you," replied Larry. Then she told him how she had detained Peter until it was too late for him to get in his story.

"And now about Parlotti," suggested the young reporter, after he had been given several more minor facts about the missing boy. He was also provided with a photograph, to use when he made inquiries about him as he worked on the case.

Madame Androletti was not sure of the address of the man she feared, but she told Larry of several hotels where Italians of note were in the habit of stopping.

"I'll trace him!" exclaimed our hero, as he started out.

It was not as easy as he had hoped, but late that afternoon he did find the place where the suspected man was registered.

"Is he in?" Larry asked the clerk at the desk.

A glance into the letter-box corresponding to the room occupied by Parlotti showed that the key was absent.

"He may be in his room," said the clerk, and a bell boy soon brought word that this was so, and that Larry was to go up.

"Come, this is too easy!" reflected the reporter. "I don't know that I exactly like this. If he had

refused to see me it would have been more natural. He must know who I am, and he has probably seen the *Leader* by this time, with his name in it. Yet, instead of hiding away, he calmly stays here and sends word that he'll see me. He doesn't act like a criminal. I wonder if, after all, Madame Androletti is right. I'm glad I qualified the yarn, and didn't say, positively, that Parlotti was the one who had the boy."

Larry was enough of a newspaper man to know how to do this. He did not want to involve the paper in a libel suit. For it is one thing to suspect a man of a crime, and it is another to convict him. And, until a person is convicted no newspaper dare, legally, state that he is guilty.

"Ah, Señor Dexter, of the *Leader*," said Parlotti, with a slight raising of his eyebrows as Larry entered the room.

"Yes," replied the young reporter.

"And what can I do for you?"

"I guess you know why I'm here," spoke Larry, bluntly.

"I have read your charming paper—yes." There was a crafty look, not unmixed with anger, in the eyes of the man.

"Is it true, what Madame Androletti says about you?" asked Larry boldly. "Do you know where her son is? Did you have a hand in taking him away?"

"I do not know where he is! I did not take him away!" cried the man excitedly. "I shall also

demand a retraction from your paper. You have slandered me."

"We'll stand the damage," spoke Larry, coolly. "But I guess there are certain things true in that story; aren't they?"

"No! Not a one! Not a one! It is all nonsense! Who am I that I should kidnap little boys? Who am I that I should want the fortune of Madame Androletti? Answer me that, Mr. Reporter?"

"I don't know who you are, and I don't care!" exclaimed Larry, boldly, for the manner of the man did not impress him. The young reporter believed Parloti to be "bluffing."

"You shall soon learn who I am!" the Italian went on. "I am not to be insulted with impunity! I shall demand a retraction from your editor, or he will meet me on the field of honor!"

"We don't have such fields over here," spoke Larry with a smile. "We use them for baseball diamonds and football gridirons. I'm afraid you'll have to think of something else."

"I shall think of my honor!" cried the Italian. "For what else did you come to see me?"

"To learn if you wanted to make any statement—to give your side of the kidnapping," replied Larry.

"Kidnapping! There has been no kidnapping!" insisted Parloti, shaking his fist at Larry, who remained cool.

"Madame Androletti's son has been stolen away," went on the reporter.

"What is that to me? I tell you I know nothing of it. I have not seen her. I——"

"You were in the music hall last night!" interrupted Larry; "I saw you. I saw you look at her, and it was when she saw you she fainted. I saw you give the 'ten' signal to your tools. I was there!" and Larry, with a sudden impulse, laid his hand on his cheek as he had seen Parlotti do.

"Ha! What is that? You saw! You! I must——"

The man was very much excited. He fairly rushed at Larry, for the Italian had been taken by surprise.

"I—I—I must—I must be calm," he whispered, as his arm sank to his side.

"Well?" asked Larry suggestively.

"I will say no more to you! I will answer no more questions. Go! I desire to be alone!"

"Then you won't tell where the stolen boy is?" asked Larry.

"No! No! A thousand times, no! I will say nothing. Get out of here!" and once more he rushed at Larry, who stood his ground, and looked fearlessly at the infuriated man.

"Leave at once, or I shall summon a porter to remove you!" cried Parlotti, reaching for the electric-bell signal.

His voice was high, and his face was red with passion. Larry thought it best to leave, and, as he turned to the door, he became aware of a mo-

tion in a room adjoining that in which he and the Italian stood.

A connecting portal swung partly open, and Larry looked eagerly toward it, hoping against hope that he might get a glimpse of the stolen boy.

He did not see Lorenzo, however, but he did see some one, at the sight of whose face he started.

For there, peering at him from the half-opened door, was one of the two men who had been in the rear of the hall—one of those to whom Parlotti had signaled.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Larry, under his breath.

"Shut that door!" yelled Parlotti in Italian, and the portal was slammed, while Larry hurried off, not caring to risk a personal encounter with the excited man who confronted him.

CHAPTER VII

LARRY SEEKS CLEWS

"WELL, there's not much to be gotten out of him, in his present state of mind," mused Larry as he went down in the hotel elevator, with a vision of the excited Parlotti before him. "But I sure did stumble on a mystery. That man in the other room showed his face just at the right time for me, and at the wrong time for Parlotti.

"I'll wager Parlotti didn't want it known that he was in the same apartment with him. Now if I could only locate the other one I'd be pretty close to where the boy is. Maybe he's in that hotel!"

For a moment Larry had half a notion to go back and demand to be allowed to search the rooms. Then a moment's reflection told him that his wild and half-formed idea could not be true.

The hotel was a well-known one, and above suspicion. It would be impossible to conceal a kidnapped boy in it, unknown to the management, especially after all the publicity that had been given to the case, for, after Larry's paper came out with the big "scoop," all the other New York journals followed, and the whole city was ringing

with the story. The police were urged by editorials, and by frenzied letters, written to the papers by frantic fathers and mothers, to leave nothing undone to get the kidnappers, and recover the boy.

"Parloti thought he could bluff me," thought Larry, "but I'm certain he had a hand in this. He's playing a bold game. I guess I need some real police aid on this case. I'll go down to headquarters."

This he did and after a consultation with a certain officer, whom he knew well, Larry and the latter decided on a plan of action.

On the reporter's promise that the detective should get the proper newspaper credit due him, the latter offered to proceed in the case, and hold for Larry exclusively all the information he got. Larry needed some one with the proper legal authority to make a search of Parloti's rooms, and also look up the two men whom the young reporter believed were the tools of the chief plotter.

"Sure I'll do it," agreed Detective Nyler, who had helped Larry with suggestions in the bank mystery. "It'll be a feather in my cap if I can arrest the kidnappers."

But it was decided to act cautiously, and to this end a watch was put on the suspected man, his hotel being under surveillance day and night. It was ascertained that the man who had been with him had gone out soon after Larry's visit, and no

one knew who he was. It would have been worse than useless, the young reporter knew, to question Parlotti again.

The Italian did not carry out his threat to "call out" the editor of the *Leader* unless a retraction was made. And the only retraction that was made was a statement to the effect that Parlotti denied knowing anything of the whereabouts of the stolen boy, or that he ever planned to take him.

Meanwhile Madame Androletti was plunged in grief, in spite of her brave attitude, and of the aid she had given Larry in trying to solve the mystery. She gave up her concert tour and, to avoid further publicity, went to a small quiet hotel in New York, under an assumed name, Larry alone, of those outside her manager and immediate friends, knowing where she was.

"And now!" exclaimed Larry, late that night, "I've got to get after some other clues. Let's see, where's the first place to start? At the music hall, of course, from where the boy disappeared. I ought to have gone there at first, but I couldn't cover everything. I'll go there now. It will be some time before the evening performance.

For a theatrical company had replaced the singer as an attraction. The magic of Larry's card admitted him behind the scenes. He wanted to talk with some of the scene-shifters, the door-keeper, and others, for he had been unable to learn anything of moment from those who made up the personal company of Madame Androletti. They

had been too busy with the performance to pay much attention to the boy.

All that they knew was that he had been roving about the wings, watching his mother sing. Then he had mysteriously vanished.

And, after much questioning, Larry was forced to admit that the stage hands and the door-keeper knew little more. A number of the scene-shifters and mechanics had noted the lad, for the singer had played a week's engagement, and the boy had been present each night, and at the matinees.

"But did any of you see him taken away?" asked Larry.

None of them had.

"How many stage doors are there?" asked the young reporter, and, learning that there were several ways of getting behind the scenes, aside from passing back of them from the front of the theater, Larry inquired of the door-keepers.

None of them had seen the boy go out alone, or in company with any one. The door-keepers were positive that this was so, and they were veterans at their business, and thoroughly to be relied upon.

For it is hard to pass the door-keeper of the stage, unless you are known, or have proper credentials, and no strangers had entered or come out that night, each guard was certain.

"But the boy disappeared!" insisted Larry. "Where did he go to? He certainly didn't vanish into the air. Some one must have taken him out."

"Or else he walked out himself, and was captured later," suggested a stage hand.

"In that case some of the door-keepers would have seen him," replied Larry, and that closed this phase of the matter.

The boy's hat and light coat were found in his mother's dressing-room, showing that he had been taken away suddenly, and without time for the plotters to properly attire him for going out. Or perhaps they had brought along a cap and a coat for him. This was likely.

"There are almost as many ends to this case as there were to the bank mystery," mused Larry when his questioning had brought him no new clues. "But I'll find something sooner or later."

He even questioned the musicians, for he thought it possible that Lorenzo might have, in some way, slipped down into the under-stage apartment set aside for the use of the orchestra. But none of them had seen the stolen lad.

Baffled, but not discouraged, Larry went home, hoping that the morning would bring some new information. It did not, though he managed to get a story concerning the activities of his friend, Detective Nyler, who had made a search of Parlotti's rooms in the hotel. There had been no trace of the stolen boy there.

"But I found out the name of the fellow you saw in the room," said the officer. "One of those who were in the back of the theater, and to whom Parlotti signaled."

"You did! Good! What is it?"

"Well, it may be a fake one, but Parlotti called him Giovanni Ferrot. So you can put that down as part of a clew, though it doesn't amount to much."

"And where is Ferrot?"

"Gone. Nobody knows where. But I'm going to look for him. I have a good description of him."

The next few days brought forth little that was new. Larry kept relentlessly on the trail of Parlotti, as did the police.

Though the young reporter did not visit the suspected man openly, he hung about his hotel, trailed and followed him when he went out, and kept so close a watch over the Italian that the quarry became nervously indignant.

"When are you going to let me alone?" he cried to Larry, one afternoon, turning suddenly on the reporter.

"When you tell me what I want to know," was the calm answer.

"But I know nothing, I tell you! I have not the stolen boy! If I had, would I remain openly here as I do?"

That was rather a poser for Larry. He did not know what to say. But still he kept his watch on Parlotti.

CHAPTER VIII

A THREATENING LETTER

THINKING the matter over calmly, Larry was forced to admit that one weak link of the chain that he sought to forge about Parlotti was the fact that the man stayed on at his hotel openly, in spite of the suspicion against him.

"If he's guilty I should think he'd escape at the first opportunity," said the city editor, while talking over the case with Larry.

"Perhaps he knows that if he tried to do that he'd be arrested," suggested the young reporter. "Flight would be an evidence of guilt, and Nyler is keeping a close watch on him. So am I."

"And he doesn't show the least sign of going away?"

"Not the least. Lots of reporters from other papers have interviewed him, and, though he admits that he is not on friendly terms with Madame Androletti, he says he knows nothing about the taking away of the boy."

"Why does he admit being unfriendly?"

"Because, he says, that the fortune she has is rightfully his, and he has brought suit to recover

it. But he was defeated in the Italian courts. He says he will yet have justice, but he denies that he would try to get it through taking away a little boy."

"What do you think, Larry?"

"Well, I don't know what to think. I believe Parlotti had a hand in the matter, in spite of what he says. But it's like the case of the bank mystery. I might be mistaken. And there's another point in this case like that Wall Street robbery."

"What's that?" inquired the city editor.

"It's this: If Parlotti is guilty, the fact of his staying here, and facing the music, and his constant denials, prove him a good actor, just as that bank clerk was, in staying in the bank when he had hidden the million away."

"That's so. Well, keep right after him, Larry, and see what you can get out of it. You might yet find the boy, and get a big 'beat'."

"I'd like to, not only for the 'scoop,' but because I would like to help Madame Androletti. She is beginning to lose hope. The suspense is terrible for her."

"I can imagine it would be. Well, do your best for her, and follow the clues wherever they lead. Don't mind the expense; the paper will stand it."

Larry redoubled his watch over Parlotti, to that individual's annoyance. He could scarcely go anywhere but either Larry or Detective Nyler, or some one in their interests, watched him. It would have been a hard matter for him to have

escaped, but apparently he did not want to do that. In vain, however, did he endeavor to shake off his relentless personal shadowers.

Meanwhile nothing had been heard of the two "tools," as Larry called them, meaning the men who had been in the back of the hall, to whom Parlotti had apparently signaled the night the boy was stolen. The big Italian refused to even talk about them, and, beyond learning the name of one—Ferrot—no information was obtained. Both seemed to have vanished utterly, and Larry suspected that they had the boy in custody, and were holding him until Parlotti could join them.

"Then will come a demand for money on poor Madame Androletti," mused Larry, "and I suppose she'll give in, for the sake of getting her son back. But I wish I could get him without her paying any ransom. I'd like to catch those kidnappers, too, and see them sent to jail for long terms."

But the more Larry puzzled over the case the more he became confused. There were few clues of any account and those he seemed to have run to the ground.

"But I am not giving up!" he exclaimed grimly. And he kept on seeking for the clue that would lead him to the hiding place of the stolen boy.

The case was now world-wide, for the singer was a well-known character. Nearly every paper in the country had published a picture of the missing lad, and the reward which his mother had

offered stimulated many to make a search for him.

Many false "tips" came into the office of the *Leader*, as they always do to every newspaper when a big story is on. And, though some of these tips, or bits of information, were false on the face of them, still none was neglected, for there was no telling when one of them might prove to be real, leading to the finding of the boy.

Larry investigated most of these, running them down and finding them to end in nothing. These took up a good deal of his time, but they also made reading matter for the paper, and this was something, for the case of the missing lad had to be kept on the front page, that being the *Leader's* policy, and to keep it there made fresh news necessary each day.

Once a tip came in that a boy, who might be the one wanted, was held a captive in a lonely hut on the New Jersey meadows, just over the river from New York.

Larry went out on this, and tramped half a day through a swamp, looking for the lonely hut. He found it, but also found that it was a sort of camp for some boys from Jersey City, who had a small motor boat, which they ran in the Hackensack River. They had fitted up a hut on the driest part of the meadows, and there they had 'royal good times, in spite of the mosquitoes. Larry came upon them one afternoon, and found the members of the "club" all present.

They made him welcome when he stated his errand, but, of course, they knew nothing of the stolen boy.

"Have something to eat?" asked the one called "Cap," probably from the fact that he ran the motorboat.

"Well, I *am* hungry," admitted the young reporter, with a smile.

Thereupon they set out what they had, and it was not at all unpalatable. They had a small stove, over which they made coffee, and fried eggs and bacon, and Larry made a good meal in rather novel surroundings.

He questioned the boys, and managed to get material for a Sunday supplement story, for such were always welcome to the hard-worked editor of that edition of the *Leader*. In turn the boys asked Larry about his work, and one and all, before he left, had determined to become reporters.

Another time Larry was sent down into the slums, where, so the "tip" stated, a boy was being held a captive. Larry did not find the boy he sought, but he did come upon a case that called for attention.

A boy, who was not perfect, mentally, had been kept in a small, dark room by some relatives who cared for him, as he was an orphan. His condition was woeful, and Larry, taking pity, notified the proper authorities. The boy was taken to an institution, operated on, and fully restored to health, becoming, some time later, a copy-boy on

the *Leader*, and eventually making a useful member of society.

So, though the tips were often misleading, not through malice, but because of overzealousness, or ignorance, some of them resulted in good.

"Well, haven't you found the boy yet?" asked Molly Mason, when Larry called on her one evening.

"Not yet," he answered wearily.

"Don't you think you ever will?"

"Well, it's hard to say, Molly. I'm still keeping a watch on this Parlotti, but it doesn't seem to do any good. He is very angry at me, and threatens to get even."

"Aren't you afraid?"

"No, not a bit. Why should I be?"

"Why, he might injure you."

"Oh, we reporters have to learn how to take care of ourselves. But I'm beginning to think that I might as well drop the Parlotti clew, and look for another. But I didn't call to talk shop. Have you anything to do this evening?"

"No."

"Then let's go to a theater. I want to forget all about clews, and missing boys, and such things for a while, and maybe I can work better afterward."

A little later the two were in a playhouse, enjoying a high-class farce, the laughs over which served to refresh Larry, who had worked hard in the past weeks.

"It's early yet," remarked the young reporter to his pretty companion, as they came out of the theater.

"Early!" she exclaimed. "What do you reporters call early, I'd like to know? It's nearly eleven o'clock."

"It's not late until one," spoke Larry with a laugh, "and that's early, as the man in the story remarked."

"But what do you mean?" asked Molly. "I'm afraid it's too late for me."

"Not at all," Larry assured her. "At least it isn't too late to go for a little taxi-ride; is it? I think it will do you good, after sitting in a hot theater. What do you say to a little spin before I take you home?"

"Oh, Larry, I'm afraid you're getting me into luxurious habits," she remarked, with a sigh, but it was not a very protesting sigh, and the young reporter at once summoned a taxi.

"Drive about anywhere," he ordered the chauffeur, who grinned cheerfully in anticipation of a fat fee. Molly settled herself comfortably back among the cushions.

"Well," she asked, "did going to the theater help you in finding any new clues to the stolen boy, Larry?"

"I'm afraid not," he replied, with a laugh, as the cab swung along the brilliantly lighted streets. "I have tried to think out a new lead, but I can't seem to. I'm up against a stone wall,

and, speaking of bricks and mortar, what do you say to taking a little spin in Central Park? That will be a change from the streets."

"All right," assented his companion, and the young reporter gave the necessary order.

They were soon speeding toward the big enclosure that forms one of New York's playgrounds, but they were not destined to ride through it, for, as they approached the entrance, there came a sudden jolt to the taxi, a muttered exclamation from the driver, and he pulled up short.

"What's the matter?" cried Larry in some alarm.

"Tire trouble, that's all. Don't worry. There's a lot of our cabs around here, and I'll summon another for you if you're in a hurry. But I'll have a good tire on in a jiffy, if you'd like to wait."

"All right; we'll wait," replied Larry, with a glance at his companion, who nodded an assent. "It's pleasant and cool sitting here," went on the young reporter, "and I think——"

He did not finish his sentence, but, with a sudden movement, leaned forward and looked at two men who were at that moment entering the park. At a glance Larry knew one to be Parloti and the other, he was sure, was one of the two men who had been in the rear of the theater the night the boy disappeared.

"There he goes!" exclaimed Larry to Molly.

"Who?" she asked, rather alarmed at his manner.

"That man! Parlotti! The one I believe took the boy. I must follow him. One of his tools is with him. And yet——"

He looked at the girl. She understood what he meant.

"Don't wait on my account," she assured him quickly. "I'm not a bit afraid here—with the chauffeur. Follow him, if you want to."

"I do want to," spoke Larry. "I'd like to see if I can gain anything from hearing them talk. And yet I don't like to desert you."

"Reporters can't always do as they like," she remarked. "It's your duty to go. Don't wait, or you may lose him."

"All right," agreed Larry. He spoke to the chauffeur:

"Say, old man, a party has just gone into the park. I want to shadow him. Will you look after the young lady until I come back?"

"Surest thing you know!" exclaimed the taximan, good-naturedly. "Go ahead. This tire is going to take me a little longer than I thought."

Larry waved his hand to Molly, and, with a smile of reassurance at her, he glided into the park. A quick look showed him a policeman standing not far away, and he felt sure his companion would not be subjected to annoyances. Besides, the chauffeur was a man Larry knew slightly and he realized that Molly would be safe.

Through the shadows, along the walks of the park, Larry ran, making as little noise as he could. He looked ahead and had a glimpse of the two men who had attracted his attention. They seemed to be talking earnestly together.

"I must hear what they say," murmured the young reporter. "It may give me the very clue I need. It may tell me whether or not it is worth while following Parlotti any more."

He managed, without attracting the attention of the men he was shadowing, to draw nearer to them. As they passed under a light Larry could see, and make sure, that it was Parlotti and one of his confederates. There was no doubt of it.

Larry got so near that he realized it was not safe to remain on the pavement any longer, so he took to the grass. Nearer and nearer he drew, until he could make out their voices.

And then a disappointment awaited him. They were talking in Italian!

"I might have known it!" whispered Larry to himself. "Oh, if I only understood Italian."

He did know a few words of it, but not enough to do him any good. Still he followed on, hoping they might change to English. But they did not, though they continued to talk excitedly, and with many gestures, in their own tongue.

Suddenly Larry trod on a stick, which broke with a loud snap. Unfortunately, at that moment, he was under a light, and the men, wheeling quickly, caught sight of him. Parlotti started,

said something in a low voice to his companion, and then walked back toward Larry. The young reporter stood calmly waiting.

"Look here!" exclaimed the suspected man, fiercely, "I know you, Mr. Reporter, and I want to tell you that I am getting tired of this! I demand that you stop following me!"

"And if I refuse?"

"Then you will take the consequences. You are in danger! Do you hear? Danger!"

Larry laughed, but he realized that it was of no use to shadow the men farther. They would be on their guard.

"Good-night!" he called coolly. "But I'll get the stolen boy yet."

"Bah!" sneered Parlotti, with a shrug of his shoulders, as he rejoined his companion. Larry turned back.

"Well?" inquired Molly, as he came up to the taxi.

"Failure," he said briefly, and then he explained. "I guess I'd better take you back," he went on, for the auto was in shape to run again. Molly said the wait had not seemed long, and the chauffeur had been very nice to her.

It was late when Larry got home, but he found his mother sitting up for him. He was surprised at this, as she did not usually do so.

"Why, mother!" he exclaimed. "Is anything the matter? Any of the children ill?"

"No, Larry, but something rather strange happened a while ago."

"What was it?"

"Well, as I was sitting here, waiting until it was a little later before going to bed, I heard a step in the hall. At first I thought it was you, home rather early. I started for the door, and, as I did so a letter was thrust under."

"A letter?"

"Yes. I picked it up, and opened the door as quickly as I could, but no one was in sight."

"Oh, that's nothing. Probably some messenger boy was in a hurry to go to a moving-picture show, and he just slid the message under, and ran downstairs. Where's the letter?"

His mother handed it to him. It was in a plain envelope, and bore no address. Larry was rather surprised. He quickly tore it open, and took out a single slip of white paper. On it was some typewriting. Larry read:

"Unless you cease hounding Parlotti you may meet the same fate as did the stolen boy."

That was all there was to it.

CHAPTER IX

A SUDDEN DISAPPEARANCE

"WHAT is it, Larry?" asked his mother, seeing a sudden change come over his face as he read the brief note. "What is it? Bad news? Has anything happened?"

The young reporter came to a quick decision. On no account must his mother know of the threat that had been made against him. She worried enough, as it was, over the dangers to which he was exposed on his various assignments. Dangers there were, sometimes imagined, but, often enough, sufficiently real to make even Larry himself wonder, at times, whether "the game was worth the candle."

"Larry, what is it?" she asked again, as he paused before replying.

"Oh, nothing," he answered as carelessly as he could.

"But I'm sure it's something!" she insisted. "A note left in that peculiar way—a messenger afraid of being seen, and then, the way you act. It must be something."

Larry laughed, though he did not feel at all gay at that moment.

"It's just about an assignment, mother," he said. "A new sort of clew—at least I hope it will be. It isn't worth bothering about. Nothing at all to worry over. Let's get to bed, it's late. We had a very nice time, Molly and I—the show was very good," and then, as if to prove what he said about the strange note being of no account, Larry crumpled it up as though to toss it aside. But he did not. Instead, he put it carefully in his pocket, crumpled as it was. He had an idea that he might trace where it came from, if he had time.

"There, that's disposed of," he remarked, with a forced note of cheerfulness in his voice. "To bed, mother."

"I'm glad you enjoyed yourself, Larry," she remarked. "Molly is a very nice girl. Lucy likes her very much," for Molly Mason had called on Larry's sister several times, and the two girls had become good friends.

In the solitude of his own room, Larry took out the anonymous letter again, carefully smoothed out the wrinkles and creases, and looked at it carefully.

"It's going to be mighty hard to trace that," he reasoned. "It's on plain paper, not even a water-mark in it, and it might have been written on almost any typewriter. If I had the time, or if it was worth it, I might find out what kind of a machine had been used, but I don't believe I will."

Larry recalled a number of cases, where, in the courts, certain disputed typewriting had been proved to have been done on a particular machine. More than this the very machine had been located, due to certain peculiarities, or defects, in the individual letters.

But, as the young reporter looked closely at the note, he could discover no faint marks, or breaks, in the type that might serve as a clew.

"I'd need a microscope to do it, anyhow," he said to himself. "And then it would be too much of a task to hunt all over New York for the machine on which this was written.

"One thing I can do, though, and I will. I'll learn if Parlotti has a typewriter, and I'll try to get a sample of the kind of work it does, for I suspect that he, or some of his tools, sent this. The chase is getting too hot for Mr. Parlotti. He's beginning to feel the pressure.

"I wonder, after all, if he's the guilty one. His staying here, after all the hue and cry, shows that he has nerve, if nothing else. He wants me to stop hounding him, does he? Well, I'll put the screws on all the harder, and I'll have Nyler do the same thing."

Larry put his resolution into effect the next day. He showed the threatening note to his detective friend, who agreed with him that it would hardly be worth while to look for the writer, unless the clews pointed strongly to Parlotti.

Larry used the note as the basis for a story, reproducing it in big type in the *Leader*, and giving a humorous turn to it, so that his mother would not worry. In fact he laughed at the threat, and practically invited the kidnappers to come and get him.

"By Jove! Everything seems to come Larry's way!" complained Peter Manton, when he saw the latest "scoop" his rival had secured, through the receipt of the note.

"Well, I wish something would come *your* way once in a while," suggested the city editor of the *Scorcher*, who did not relish having his paper beaten so often. "Why can't you write a note to yourself, drop it in the box, and play it up for a sensation?" he asked. "We might have a story then."

"It wouldn't do, after this one," said Peter. "Everyone would guess that it was faked. Besides, I haven't gotten after Parlotti the way Larry has."

"Well, why haven't you?"

"Because I don't believe he took the boy."

"You don't? Who do you think did?"

"I'm blessed if I know," and Peter scratched his head in perplexity.

"Well, if I called myself a newspaper reporter I'd get a story once in a while!" exclaimed the city editor, in disgust. "Otherwise you might as well go back to the real estate business," for Peter had tried that, after having been a reporter for a

while, but the call of the ink and the presses had been too much for him, and he had gone back to his desk and typewriter. "Get a story!" exclaimed the editor.

"I'll try," promised Peter, but he did not have much hope of success.

In the meanwhile Larry "put the screws" on Parlotti. He kept after him closer than ever, and besides Nyler, several other detectives "shadowed" him more closely than before. Parlotti's life was made miserable.

It became known that he was a sort of gentleman adventurer, with no particular trade or calling, living on his wits, principally, and on a small income from property in Italy. He was well educated, and spoke English almost perfectly. He had been decorated several times, and, had he chosen to live a more usual sort of life, might have done well. But he was too much a soldier of fortune to do this.

Larry worked night and day seeking for clues, not only for the missing boy, but for some trace of the person who had written him the threatening letter. On the latter, however, he failed. Larry interviewed the janitor of the apartment house where he and his mother lived, but the man had seen nothing of the messenger who had left the note, and had so silently disappeared afterward.

"He must have come in with a false key," the

janitor said, "for the door is kept locked at night."

"Whoever it was went to a lot of trouble," remarked the young reporter, "for he could just as well have mailed me the letter to my home, or at the office, and I wouldn't have had so much chance of finding out where it came from as though he left it. He took a chance on being caught."

"But he wasn't," said the janitor.

"No, worse luck, he wasn't," agreed Larry grimly.

So close a watch was kept on Parlotti that it was believed he could hold no communication with his two tools, as Larry called them, without the fact being known to the police. The suspected man was under surveillance night and day, but nothing developed.

"I can't understand it," said Larry, much puzzled, when two weeks had passed, and no trace of Lorenzo had been found.

"The same here," grumbled Detective Nyler. "I never saw a case that was so plain on the face of it, and yet was so puzzling when you come to work it out. Think of it—a boy in plain sight of his mother in a theater one minute, and the next he disappears as if by magic. And, mind you, not a soul seems to have noticed which way he went, or what became of him after he left the wings for a moment.

"And then this Parlotti. I've tried every way

I know to tangle him up, and trip him, but he just goes on staying at his hotel as if he never had a thought of kidnapping the boy, though he practically threatened to do so."

"It is queer," admitted the young reporter. "I'm going to have another talk with him. Madame Androletti is wasting away from grief, and maybe if I put it to him strongly enough he'll weaken and give himself away."

"I doubt it, but you can try," suggested the detective with a shrug of his shoulders.

"It might be a good plan to have Madame Androletti see him herself," went on Larry. "That would bring him around, if anything would, I should think, to have him see the way she takes it. I'm going to try."

But that plan failed, though not for want of trying. The singer did indeed visit the man suspected, and though he received her courteously, he denied knowing anything of the matter. He even said he would help her if he could, but this was not believed, for there was that old feud between the two, and the singer did not trust him.

Nor was Larry any more successful. He made what he declared was his last appeal to Parlotti, begging him to tell his tools, who had the boy, to name the price of ransom, and end the widow's suspense.

"It is of no use, Señor Dexter!" exclaimed the Italian fiercely. "I will not receive you again, nor talk to you. I have not the boy, I never had

him—nor have my ‘tools,’ as you call them. It is useless to persecute me further. I can tell you nothing. I will tell you nothing. Leave me alone, or——”

“You’ll write more threatening letters, I suppose,” said Larry boldly.

“No, señor!” cried the man. “I never wrote you any letter, nor did I tell any one to. We of the Parlotti race do not threaten—we *act!*” and there was that in his voice, and in the sinister look he cast at the young reporter, to show that he meant what he said. But Larry was not afraid.

The days dragged on, and there was no news. Larry was at his wits’ ends for clues, and for news to print about the case. Most of the other papers had dropped the kidnapping story, or, at best, used only a few lines concerning it. But Larry would not give up. Nor, did the police, for it was rather a reflection on them that, under their very noses, a boy had been kidnapped and they could not get a clue to him.

“Well, anything new to-day?” asked Larry of Detective Nyler, when on a visit to police headquarters one afternoon.

“There sure is,” was the unexpected answer.

“You don’t mean to say you’ve gotten something out of Parlotti?” exclaimed the young reporter.

“No, and none of us will for a long time, I fancy. He’s skipped out.”

"What! Gone!" gasped Larry.

"That's it, and he went suddenly, too, last night. I was watching the hotel off and on. I saw him come in, and go up to his room. He didn't know me, for I had on a new disguise. I was an old newspaper man."

"Newspaper man?"

"Yes, one who sells 'em, not the kind that gets the items," explained the detective, with a smile. "Well, as I said, Parloti came in, and went up to his room, but he never came down again."

"Never came down again? You don't mean he's dead; do you?"

"Not a bit of it. He skipped out. Went down the fire-escape, which is just outside his window. Larry, he's given us the slip."

"Then he's guilty after all!" cried the young reporter. "He's fooled us completely. He played us for amateur detectives. He stayed here long enough to make it look as if he wasn't the man we wanted, and then, when he gets a chance, and suspicion is beginning to weaken, he lights out."

"It looks so," admitted Nyler.

Larry started to leave the room.

"Where are you going?" asked the detective.

"I'm going to the hotel where Parloti used to stay, and see if I can pick up any clues in his apartment."

"Good. I'll go with you!"

CHAPTER X

THE TORN NOTE

ONLY a word from Detective Nyler to the hotel clerk was needed to enable Larry and his friend to visit the room of the man who had disappeared so suddenly.

"It's just as he left it," remarked the officer, when they stood in the apartment.

"How do you know?" asked Larry.

"Because, after I found out I'd been fooled I made it my business to come in here, and not a thing has been changed. You see, Parlotti's week isn't up for a few days yet, and, as he has paid for the room, they can't very well put his things out. I even spoke to the chambermaid, and asked her not to sweep or dust; I thought we might like to look around."

"That's good," commented Larry. "But how did you know he'd gone down the fire-escape?"

"I'll tell you. It's simple enough when you know how. After I saw him come in the hotel, and go up in the elevator, presumably to his room, I got rid of my disguise as a seller of papers. I had been in the hotel lobby, and that's how I hap-

pened to see Parloti. When I thought he was safely settled in his room, I came up to mine."

"Yours?" asked Larry in surprise. "I didn't know you had a room here."

"Yes, I hired one a few days ago. It's right across the hall from Parloti's, and I've been keeping tabs on him, but up to the time he left I hadn't been able to get anything on him.

"As I said, I went to my room, which was just across the corridor from his. By standing on a chair, and looking through the transom over my door, I could see into his room, and, owing to the fact that his transom was opened, and that there is a large mirror in his room, I had a good view of everything he did.

"I satisfied myself early last night that he was doing nothing more than reading, and then I sat down to wait. In a little while I heard his door open, in response to a knock. I looked out and saw a messenger boy standing there with a telegram. Parloti was quite excited when he read it a little later, and I watched him pace up and down his room. Then I sat down to await developments, but I had a hole in my door, through which I could see when his opened.

"I felt that I had him safe, for I knew he couldn't come out without me seeing him. His room has but one door, though he has a connecting bath, and a small dressing-room. But they can only be entered through his apartment.

"Well, after sitting there for a while, listening

for his door to open, and taking occasional glances through the hole in my door, I thought I'd take another transom-look. I did, and I saw that he wasn't there. I waited some time, and he did not come from either of the other rooms. Then I got suspicious.

"With a skeleton key I went in his apartment. He had left, and the open window at the fire-escape, and some marks in the dust on the iron platform, showed me plainly enough how he'd given us the slip. Of course I got busy at once, but I couldn't get a trace of him. The fire-escape that he went down lands in a little alley, seldom used, and he could travel along that, after dark, and get out on the street without being seen. Oh, he fooled us all right!"

Larry said nothing for a few seconds after the detective finished his narrative. Then he asked:

"Did you look for that telegram?"

"I did, but I couldn't find it. He must have taken it with him."

"Couldn't you get a copy of it at the office? You know, telegraph companies make a copy of every message that comes over the wires."

"Yes, I know that, but this wasn't a regular message. It must have been written by some of Parlotti's friends, who just stepped into a district messenger office and had it delivered by a boy. That is often done."

"If we could only find that note!" exclaimed

Larry, "it might give us a clew to the whole mystery."

"It might," agreed the officer, "but it's gone."

"How do you know?"

"Because, over the transom I saw Parlotti tear it up, and put the pieces in his pocket. He took it away with him. He isn't such a dunce as to risk leaving evidence like that behind."

"I suppose not," said Larry, "especially as it was probably a message telling him to skip. If we only had it! I wonder if, by any possible chance, he could have dropped pieces of it when he went down the fire-escape? It was pretty windy last night, and some of the scraps might have blown out of his pocket, especially in going down a fire-escape ladder."

"Well, it's worth looking into," assented Detective Nyler. "Here, you're younger than I am, Larry, climb down the escape, and look about on the ground. You may find something."

It did not take the young reporter long to do this. But his careful search was not rewarded by so much as a fragment of paper that was of any service. He did find a receipted hotel bill that Parlotti had evidently dropped from the window, or that had fallen from his pocket, but this was all. There were no pieces of a torn note to help solve the riddle.

Larry climbed up the fire-escape to the room again. Then he and the detective went carefully over the apartment. It was evident that Parlotti

had left in haste, for his clothing was scattered about, showing that he had hurriedly packed some and left the rest behind.

"What sort of a coat did he have on when he tore up the note and put the pieces in the pocket?" asked the young reporter, as he looked into a closet containing several suits that the Italian had left.

"Well, it was what some people call a smoking jacket, though I never could understand why a man couldn't smoke just as well in an ordinary coat as in one of those fancy ones. It was a smoking jacket, and——"

The detective stopped suddenly, for Larry was taking from a closet the very jacket in question. The young reporter held the garment up in one hand, and, with the other, he began exploring the pockets on either side.

"Here's something!" he cried, as he pulled out some torn fragments of paper. "Maybe it's the note."

"By Jove!" exclaimed the detective. "I am a dumb one! Say, I never stopped to think that Parlotti wouldn't make a getaway in his smoking jacket. He had that on when he got the note. He tore the paper up, and stuck the pieces in the pocket. I saw him do that. Then I sat down to watch. When I looked again he was gone. And I just passed over that jacket in the closet as if it didn't amount to anything. Say, put me back

in the baby class, will you?" he asked Larry. "I don't belong on the police force."

"Oh, that's nothing," said the young reporter. "Any one would make that mistake, and it was only by luck that I happened to think of it. But maybe, after all, this isn't the note we want."

"We can soon tell," said the detective, clearing a space on the bureau.

Together they began fitting together the pieces of the torn note. It was very soon evident that it was not all there.

"He took most of it with him," said Mr. Nyler. "Even in his hurry he thought of that. He must have reached his hand in the pocket of this jacket, and grabbed up the pieces as he was leaving. But he did not get them all."

"There are only a few words I can make out," said Larry, "and they don't seem to be connected. This is the best we can do."

They peered at the pieces of the torn note. The words that confronted them were these:

boy
located
come
ot.

CHAPTER XI

LARRY MEETS A FARMER

"SAY, that doesn't make any sense!" exclaimed Detective Nyler, as he stared at the few words, and parts of words on the torn note. "I don't see what good that's going to do, after all our success in finding it."

"No, it doesn't make sense," agreed Larry. "But I think I can make something of it."

"What?"

"Well, in the first place I believe the stolen boy is referred to. Of course it might be some other stolen boy, but, knowing that Parloti had an interest in forcing Madame Androletti to come to terms about the property in Italy, it is evidently her boy who is referred to."

"Probably," agreed the detective, "and yet that word we take for 'boy,' might be some other one. You can see that the two other words are only partly here. Maybe 'boy' is part of a word."

"Yes," assented Larry, "but there are very few words in ordinary use that end in boy, except, of course, such as bell-boy or copy-boy or errand boy, or some of those. There is carboy, to be

sure, one of those big bottles they put acids in, and hautboy, but——”

“What in the world is a ho-boy?” asked the detective, pronouncing the word as Larry had done, but which is not the way it is spelled. “I never heard of one.”

“A hautboy,” explained the young reporter, “is a sort of musical instrument, like a clarionet. I don’t believe Parlotti’s correspondent meant that, though, of course, he might. I think he referred to the stolen boy.”

“So do I,” agreed the detective. “But what do you make of the rest? ‘Ocated’ isn’t a word, and neither is ‘ot.’”

“No, but the first undoubtedly means located, and the last, unless I’m mistaken is the signature.”

“But who would sign himself just ‘Ot,’ like some African cannibal?”

“Ferrot, the man who probably helped Parlotti get the boy,” exclaimed Larry quickly.

“That’s it!” cried Nyler. “Larry, you’re on the right track! This note, torn as it is, makes a good clew. Ferrot wrote it, and sent it to Parlotti, telling him he had the boy located, and to come at once. Now I see my way clear. The first place we want to head for is the district messenger office nearest this hotel.”

“Why?”

“To ask which of the boys brought a note here last night for Parlotti. And then, from the clerk in charge, we can find out if anyone answering the

description of Ferrot left it to be delivered. We're on the right track at last."

"Just wait a minute," suggested Larry, who had gathered up the fragments of the note. "If Parlotti had a hand in stealing the boy, or his men did, why should one of them send him word that the boy was located? Wouldn't they know where he was themselves?"

For a moment the detective was silent. Then he burst out with:

"No! By Jove, Larry, I'm beginning to see things now. The boy got away after they had him, and they've only just now located him. That explains it. That shows why Parlotti hung around New York after poor little Lorenzo was spirited away.

"Some of their plans went wrong, and the boy gave them the slip. He couldn't get back to his mother, or communicate with her, or he'd have done so. Maybe they had him drugged, or something like that. Anyhow, he was out of their possession, and Ferrot, or some of the kidnapping gang, happened to locate him. Then they sent word to the chief conspirator, Parlotti, to come at once, and he did. He didn't dare go openly, for he knew we'd be after him, so he took the fire-escape route."

"It begins to look that way," admitted the young reporter. "But what's to be done next?"

"I don't know. Still, it isn't as bad as it was. If they only got possession of the boy for the

second time last night, they haven't much the start of us. Come on!"

Carefully saving the pieces of the note, Larry followed his detective friend from the hotel to police headquarters. There the intricate machinery of the "Scotland Yard" department (so called after the English detective bureau) was put into operation.

Every available man was instructed to be on the lookout for the stolen boy, since it was possible he might yet be in New York. Officers, whose posts took in the Italian, and other foreign sections, of the city were told to be on the lookout, and outgoing steamers and trains were watched.

Larry got a fine story, and a beat, about the finding of the torn note, and the flight of Parlotti. All the other papers had to copy the account, and Peter Manton received another severe "call down" from his city editor for being "scooped."

"Say, there's no use trying to get ahead of Larry Dexter on this game," declared Peter, and his city editor was beginning to believe him.

As for Madame Androletti, her hopes revived when the news was brought to her, but after several days had passed, and nothing further developed, she became gloomy again. It began to look as if the clew of the torn note would prove unavailing.

Larry was working hard, but, try as he did, he seemed to be up against a stone wall. The stolen boy was as well hidden as ever. As for Parlotti,

there was no trace of him. He had disappeared as completely as had little Lorenzo Androletti.

"Well, I'm sure I don't know what to do!" exclaimed Larry one day; "I'm at the end of my rope."

Then, as he had often done before, when puzzled or worried, he decided to take a walk, and he picked out the Bronx, the upper section of New York, as his destination.

Riding in the subway and the elevated trains to Bronx Park, Larry strolled through that, looking at the animals, but not thinking about them. Then he branched off into what was as near the country as any place so near a large city could be. It was in the West Farms section of the old city of Manhattan, a place of historical interest, but Larry thought little of this now. His mind was too busy with thoughts of the stolen boy.

Leaving behind the big apartment houses, which were springing up on every side, the young reporter soon found himself in a comparatively quiet spot, and he walked along what was once a country road.

"It's nicer here than in the city," reflected Larry. "It's like where we used to live. I almost wish I was back on the farm again. This being a reporter, and solving mysteries, isn't what it's cracked up to be. But I'm not going to quit now," and he shut his teeth with dogged determination.

Larry walked on for some distance, getting farther and farther away from the turmoil of the city. But if he had hoped that the quiet would help him to think better, or aid him to hit on some plan for finding the stolen boy, he was doomed to disappointment. The more he puzzled over the mystery the more tangled up he became.

"Where is he?" he murmured to himself. "Where is Lorenzo? Why can't I get some trace of him?"

Looking down the road Larry saw a cloud of dust approaching. At first he took it to be some one on a motorcycle.

"Guess I'll get on the other side," he mused, "so I won't get so much of the dust."

He was about to cross over, when he saw that the cloud was caused by an elderly man, driving a rather dilapidated wagon, attached to a somewhat bony horse. The man was urging the animal to top speed, which was not saying much.

"In something of a hurry," said Larry to himself. "The truck farmers around here aren't usually that way."

For the outfit looked like one belonging to a small gardener, and Larry, looking about him, saw several cultivated patches of land that, one day, would be sites for big apartment houses.

As the farmer came opposite Larry the horse was pulled in with a jerk, and the man, whose chin whiskers vibrated up and down with a queer motion as he talked, hailed our hero.

"Say, be I on the right road for police headquarters?" the man asked.

"Well, you can get there this way, if you keep going far enough," replied Larry. "But the Bronx station is nearer. Why, have you been robbed?"

"No, I hain't, young feller. Burglars has got t' git up pretty middlin' early in th' mornin' t' rob Hank Meldron. That's my name. But I want a detective, or some one like that, and I reckoned police headquarters was th' place t' find 'em."

"It is, but there are some attached to the Bronx station. What is the trouble?" asked Larry, scenting a story at once.

"Matter? Matter enough, I reckon. I want t' give information about a boy bein' held in captivity near my place, that's what I want t' do! It's suthin' scandalous th' way he's being treated. I'm goin' t' notify th' police at once!"

A boy in captivity! Larry was all excitement at once. He saw big possibilities here.

CHAPTER XII

THE LONELY HOUSE

LARRY crossed the road and stood beside the ancient farm wagon. The driver saw his intention, and waited for our hero, yelling a command to the horse to stand still. This was hardly needed, as the steed showed no signs of desiring to move. It had not been driven so fast before in many years.

"I know several detectives at police headquarters," said Larry, his heart beating strangely at the possibility he saw before him. "I also know some in the Bronx here, and perhaps I can help you. If you'll tell me why you want an officer I can telephone downtown, and that will be quicker than driving in."

"I guess it will be, young feller. I'd a telephoned myself, only I don't know how to use th' queer contraption. I tried it once, an' by heck, I got so twisted that I didn't know which end t' put t' my ear, so I reckoned I'd hitch up an' take in th' news by word of mouth. I'm a stranger 'round here. I jest started a truck farm. I am from Jersey."

"But what's the matter?" asked Larry. "You say there's a boy being held in captivity?"

"That's what he is, stranger, an' every time he tries t' git away them tramps chase after him, while one feller, with a gun, stands ready t' shoot him if he gits too far. It's nothin' short of scandalous, that's what I say, an' arter my wife an' I talked it over this mornin' I decided t' tell th' authorities."

"Did the boy try to get away this morning?" asked Larry.

"He sure did. An' suthin' ought t' be done about it. Maybe, arter all, I'd better drive in t' N'York. An' yet I don't like t', with Major here. He's easily riled when he sees one of them automobiles, an' I understand they're tolable thick in th' city."

"They certainly are," replied Larry. "I think we can do better by telephoning, or putting the horse up at some stable around here, and going to the Bronx station."

"Well, young feller, seeing as how you seem t' know th' ropes, I'll leave it t' you. We'll put Major up at that road house over there, and I'll tell ye all 'bout it."

This first was soon done, and, when he had the truck farmer in a quiet spot along the road, Larry began asking questions.

"I'll tell you all about it," promised Mr. Mel-dron, which he proceeded to do.

It appeared that he lived in an old-fashioned

farm-house, about five miles from where Larry had met him. He did a general truck-raising business, carting his vegetables to a small town just outside of the limits of Manhattan, whence they were sent to market.

"There's constables there," he said, "but land sakes, I wouldn't trust 'em with a case like this, even if my own brother-in-law is on th' force, an' has a reg'lar badge. This is a case for *real* detectives."

"What sort of a case is it?" asked Larry, who, so far, had not been able to get much satisfaction from the farmer.

"It's a case of a boy bein' held in captivity," explained the man. "I've got quite considerable of a piece of land," he went on, "and part of it, where I raise my late beans, is down in a holler, behind a big hill. About half a mile away there's an old house that nobody's lived in for years. There's some trouble as to who it belongs t', an' nobody will take a chance òn rentin' it, 'cept maybe fer a month or so. Anyhow, th' house has been empty for quite a spell.

"This mornin' I went out t' look at th' beans; when I got on top of th' hill that looks down in th' holler, where th' old house is, I see suthin' goin' on there that I didn't like."

"What was it?" asked Larry.

"Well, it was two or three rough-dressed men hangin' around there. Tramps, I sized 'em up for, right away, an' as we've had more or less

trouble with them fellers out our way, I looked for all I was wuth."

"But I thought you said something about a boy," spoke Larry.

"So I did, I'm comin' t' that part of it in a minute. I watched them tramps, an' see that they was gittin' a meal. There was smoke comin' out from the chimbley, an' one of th' ragged fellers was pumpin' water.

"Well, I thinks t' myself, it ain't no fun t' have a colony of tramps camped so close t' your house. They come in an' steal late vegetables an' fruit, an' land knows it's hard enough t' make a livin' as it is without feedin' tramps. So I was makin' up my mind that I'd notify my brother-in-law, who's a constable, an' we'd clean th' place out.

"Then I seen suthin' that puzzled me. Out from th' house come a feller who wasn't dressed like a tramp. He was—well, he was dressed as good as you be," and the farmer looked at Larry approvingly. "Thinks I t' myself, this must be th' boss tramp. Then I see him sort of talkin' t' th' others, and pretty soon one of 'em come out with a cannon."

"A cannon!" exclaimed Larry, wondering if the men of whom the farmer was speaking were desperate enough to fortify the house they occupied.

"Yep; leastways it looked like a cannon. It was on wheels, and it was black, an' it had a muzzle to it."

"What did they do with it?"

"Well, th' well-dressed feller, he took it down the road a piece, an' then he aimed it at th' house."

"What happened next?" asked Larry, full of curiosity.

"That's the queer part of it. Here's where the boy comes in. The feller trained the cannon on th' house, an' them tramps didn't seem t' mind it a bit. They went right on gettin' their meal, drawin' water, an' choppin' wood, and what not. Fust time I ever see tramps work without being made."

"But about the boy?" cried Larry impatiently.

"I'm comin' t' him," said the farmer. "Arter a bit one of th' tramps went in th' house, an' th' others sort of disappeared. Then, all t' once I see a little feller, somewhat smaller than you, runnin' out of that house t' beat th' band.

"Out of th' old weed-grown front yard he come, and then he began t' leg it down th' road, straight toward th' feller that was standin' by the cannon. Thinks I t' myself he'll be shot sure. That's what th' cannon's for, I thinks, an' I were jest a goin' t' yell, when I see a whole lot of them tramps come streamin' out from behind th' house, an' they chases arter th' poor lettles feller who was runnin' t' beat th' band.

"Gosh! you never saw such a chase. Down th' road run th' boy, with th' tramps arter him, an' the feller with th' cannon waitin' t' blow him

t' flinders. Then th' boy got in sight of th' gun, but he never stopped. Talk about pluck! He had it all right.

"Th' feller with th' cannon tried t' shoot it, but, seems like it got jammed, or stuck, or suthin'. Anyhow he couldn't shoot it, for I didn't see no smoke, an' I didn't hear no noise. It might have been one of them new-fangled wireless cannon, eh?"

"Maybe," agreed Larry. "What next?"

"Well, them tramps kept chasin' arter that poor boy until finally they caught up to him. Say, I jest wish you could see th' way they grabbed him! It was sure scandalous! I yelled out, but they was too far away t' hear me."

"Why didn't you run over and help him?" asked Larry.

"I didn't dast. Them tramps is desprit fellers," replied the farmer. "Anyhow, they was too quick for me. They had th' poor feller caught 'fore I could say Jack Robinson. He tried t' git away, but he couldn't, an' they certainly handled him shameful.

"They started back toward th' house with him, an' by heck, if he didn't give 'em th' slip when he was close t' it. Yes, he did. I give him credit for it, too. He got away an' he run like a white-head, but th' tramps was too much fer him, an' they took him in th' house."

"Is he there yet?" asked Larry eagerly, his

mind filled with visions of Lorenzo, the stolen boy.

"I think he is," replied the farmer. "I was so excited that I jest stood there in my bean patch, wonderin' if I'd dreamed it all. I were jest comin' away, thinkin' how I could best notify th' New York police, when suthin' else happened."

"What?" asked Larry impatiently.

"Th' boy got away again. Yes, by jimminet-ties! He did! Clumb out of a winder, on a rope, too. Slid down it as slick as ever I see. But, poor feller, he didn't git clear."

"Why not?"

"Because there was a couple of them tramp fellers waitin' for him. They grabbed him as soon as he landed on th' ground, an' took him inside. Lands sakes, but I felt sorry for th' plucky chap."

"What next?" cried Larry.

"Then I come away," replied Mr. Meldron. "I wanted t' notify th' police as soon as I could, so I hitched up an' here I be."

"And it's a good thing you acted as you did!" cried Larry. "I think you have helped solve a big mystery."

"How's that?"

"Why, I believe the boy you speak of is the little lad stolen from Madame Androletti!" cried the young reporter. "I think I am on the trail at last!"

"Get out! You don't mean it!" cried the

farmer. "Then you come right back with me, an' we'll raid them tramps, an' git th' boy."

"Right!" cried Larry.

A little later he and the farmer were driving back along the country road, and, after a hasty explanation to his wife, the truck-grower led Larry to the bean patch.

"There's th' lonely house, where th' boy is held captive!" exclaimed the farmer, pointing to a deserted dwelling down in the hollow. Larry gazed at it curiously and hopefully.

CHAPTER XIII

THE RAID

FOR a few moments the young reporter did not speak. Then Farmer Meldron exclaimed:

"Wa'all, what had best be done about it?"

"I don't exactly know. I've got to think about it," replied Larry. "We've got to go slow, and be careful, or they may take the alarm, and spirit the boy away."

"That's what I thought," said the farmer. "That's why I took care not to be seen by 'em while I was watchin'. But land sakes, them fellers seem as bold as brass!"

"You say the boy ran down the road, and the tramps raced after him?" asked Larry, eagerly looking toward the lonely house. There was now no sign of life about it.

"That's what they did," explained Mr. Meldron.

"I should think they would have been seen by some one driving along the road," went on Larry. "Either they are very bold, or else they are taking foolish chances, trying to hold a boy captive in such an open place as that."

"Well, it's open enough, I'll allow," admitted

the reporter's companion, "but then that road ain't much traveled. It's an old one, but I don't s'pose any one drives on it once a month. Some folks use it for a short cut, but usually it's so cut up, and spoiled by the rain, that it's better to go the long way around. You can save time.

"So that's why no one but me seen the boy bein' chased, and that was only by accident. It's dreadful lonely down in that hollow, and hardly any one ever goes near the house. It couldn't be a better place for them kidnappin' tramps. But what had we best do? I wonder who that poor little boy is, anyhow?"

"I think I know!" said Larry.

"You don't say! Know him! Well, for land sakes! How comes that?"

"I think he is the stolen boy for whom I've been looking a long time," went on the young reporter. "Most unexpectedly I have stumbled on his place of captivity. It's lucky I met you," and he proceeded to tell of the kidnapping of Lorenzo Androletti. The farmer listened, full of wonder.

"Say, that's a case!" he exclaimed when Larry had finished. "And they took him right out of the theater when his maw was singin'! Say, them kidnappers is bold fellers, all right! I hope they go to jail for life."

"So do I, but I hope we get them first, and gain possession of the boy," spoke Larry. "Now, we've got to make some plan to raid the house, and surround it so they can't get away."

"Now you're talkin'!" exclaimed Mr. Meldron. "Maybe we'd better have brought some police back with us."

"No; I think we shall do very well with what help we can get around here," replied Larry. "Is there a telephone anywhere near?"

"Yes, my brother-in-law has one. He's a constable, you know, and often he's called on t' arrest chicken thieves, and the like. Why?"

"Well, I want to call up some officer, a deputy sheriff, or a constable, or some one like that, and have him come with us. Your brother-in-law would do all right, just so we have some one with legal authority to make arrests. Then you and I, and a few other men from around here, can raid that place as well as if we had the New York police with us."

"Think so?" asked the farmer doubtfully.

"I'm sure of it," replied Larry confidently. "Those tramps won't fight back."

"If they do, by heck! I've got an old musket that I can take along!" exclaimed the farmer. "I keep it to shoot chicken hawks with, but it'll do for child-stealers jest as well. Say, young feller, I'm with you from the drop of the hat! Glad I met you. Come on, now, we'll go see if my brother-in-law is t' home. Nestor, his name is—Bob Nestor—and he's strong and hearty. Let's get a move on."

Larry glanced once more toward the lonely house which he hoped would hold the solution of

the mystery of the stolen boy. The farmer was moving off through his bean patch. There still was no sign of life about the deserted place.

Then, as Larry looked, and when he was on the verge of turning to follow Mr. Meldron, he saw a man emerge from the house. Even at that distance Larry could see that the fellow was roughly dressed. Soon he was joined by two more, who came from the place, and the three proceeded to kindle a fire on the ground.

"Look here!" called Larry to Mr. Meldron. "What do you think they're up to now. Going to burn the house?"

"No; I don't reckon so. Likely they're goin' to cook a meal. They can't probably do much cookin' in th' old house, for the chimbley must be pretty well busted, and caved in.

"Yes, that's what they're up to," the farmer went on, having come back to stand at Larry's side. "See, thy're hangin' a gypsy kittle over th' fire. They're goin' to make soup. That shows they're goin' t' stay a spell, anyhow. Now's our chance t' get a crowd, an' raid 'em."

"That's right!" agreed Larry. The two, who were concealed from observation by a stack of bean poles, watched the tramps a few minutes longer, until they saw the preparations for the meal well under way. Several of the crowd of men had now come from the house and were seated about the fire.

"Is it far to your brother-in-law's house?"

asked Larry, as he followed the farmer through the bean patch.

"About a mile. There's several neighbors near him that we can get. They're all truck farmers like me, and I guess we can take care of them tramps."

Larry's heart was beating high with hope. All at once he saw his search ended successfully, and the stolen boy recovered. He saw, in fancy, the glad mother, and while the young reporter would willingly have worked for her interests alone, as well as that of her son, he was glad over the prospect of a big exclusive story. That was one reason why he did not care to have the New York police mixed up in the case. With them making the raid it was likely that the story would "leak" to other newspapers.

By a lucky chance Bob Nestor was found at home. He was properly excited over the prospect of raiding the tramps, and recovering a kidnapped boy.

"I've been wanting some exercise for some time," he said, as Larry and Mr. Meldron told their stories, "and this looks like I was going to get it. I'll just pin on my badge, and take a couple of pairs of handcuffs along. Likely I'll need more, but we can just handcuff the most desperate ones, and the rest we can hold until we get 'em to the nearest jail. Guess we'd better take 'em to Whitfield," he said to his relative, naming a small town nearby. Mr. Meldron agreed.

By using the telephone, a number of neighboring truck-growers were communicated with, and they readily agreed to come over and help raid the tramps.

"Say, this'll be exciting all right!" exclaimed one burly man over the wire. "I wouldn't miss it for a good deal!"

In about an hour the posse had assembled at the constable's house. Some of them carried old-fashioned muzzle-loading guns, and one man had a pitchfork. Others had caught up heavy clubs.

"This looks like business," remarked Larry, who had been introduced to the men. They greeted him kindly, and some were not a little awed by the fact that, as one of them whispered, "He's writ lots of pieces for th' papers," while another recalled Larry's part in the great bank mystery.

As for the young reporter, he wanted to telephone word in to his paper about the big story in prospect, but he reflected that using the wire might somehow allow the story to get out before he was ready, and his "scoop" might be spoiled.

"I'll just wait," he decided. "Besides, there might be some slip-up. This may not be the Androletti boy, but some other poor chap who has been kidnapped, though I haven't heard of any other lad being taken away lately."

"Wa'al, now that we're ready, we may as well start," suggested Mr. Meldron, when his brother-in-law, the constable, had looked over his force.

"No use waitin' too long, or them scoundrels may give us the slip yet."

It was agreed that the sooner the raid was made the better it would be, and the posse started off. They planned to approach the old house from several points, so as to surround it as nearly as possible.

"There's ten of us," remarked Mr. Meldron, who kept close to Larry, "an' I guess them tramps will have a hard job breakin' through our lines. If any of 'em try to get past you, boys, swat 'em!"

"We will!" came the grim chorus.

It was decided to move up swiftly, once each man was in his appointed place, and, as the country around the place was well wooded, except on the side where Larry and Mr. Meldron had watched the deserted house, it was thought there would be little chance of discovery until it was too late for the tramps to escape.

Larry and Mr. Meldron were to approach through the bean patch, but by crouching down, and taking advantage of the cover of underbrush, and bushes, they could come up very close without being seen.

"Forward, march!" exclaimed Bob Nestor, and the raid was under way. There was not a little nervous apprehension, on the part of everyone, and Larry found himself wondering what would happen, and whether he could rescue the captive lad.

CHAPTER XIV

WHAT HAPPENED

LARRY was so intent on the progress of himself and Mr. Meldron that he paid little attention to what the others were doing. They had left him and his companion, in order to circle about the suspected house, and were soon out of sight.

"We're to close in when we hear Bob fire his gun in the air, ain't we?" asked Mr. Meldron in a whisper, when he and Larry had advanced some distance through the underbrush.

"That's it. He's got the farthest to go, and it will take him some little time to get around. We'll have to wait for him. I hope everything comes off all right."

"So do I," said the farmer. "I guess them tramps won't light out right away. It's dinner time, and they're as fond of eatin' as most folks, I reckon."

"I'm beginning to feel that way myself," spoke Larry, for he had had an early breakfast that morning, and it was now past noon.

In due time Larry and his companion had approached as close as they dared to the house,

without running the chance of being seen. They crouched down behind a fringe of bushes, while in front of them was an open space, what had once been the yard about the old house, but which was now overgrown with long and tangled grass.

The young reporter and the farmer were about three hundred feet away from the house, and they had a clear view of the tramps, who were gathered about the fire, over which something was cooking in a kettle. Now and then one of the sprawling men on the ground would go to the pot, and dip out some soup in a tin can which served him for a plate.

The group seemed to be a merry one, though they did not talk loudly enough for Larry to hear what they were saying. Occasionally one of them would break out into song, the others joining in a chorus.

"Some of 'em is good singers, if they be tramps," commented Mr. Meldron in a whisper.

"That's so," agreed Larry. "And they're all disguised, too?"

"Disguised? How do you mean?"

"Why, nearly every one of 'em has a false beard or mustache on. I can see it from here. They don't fit very well." Larry had had some experience with false beards, when working on the bank mystery, and he knew what he was talking about.

"Disguised!" exclaimed the farmer. "Well, I s'pose that's natural."

Larry looked beyond the house for a sight of any of the other raiders, but he saw none of them.

"I wish they'd hurry up," spoke the farmer. "Not that these here fellers show any signs of trying to skip, but I'd like the job over with."

"So would I," agreed Larry. "I don't see anything of the boy, though, do you?"

"Not a sign," replied the farmer. "But they've probably got him safe under lock and key after the way he tried to escape before."

"Here comes someone else out of the house," spoke Larry in a whisper. "Maybe something is going to happen."

The man who came down the steps was apparently a tramp like the rest, but he seemed to be the leader.

"Get ready!" he called to the others, loudly enough for Larry and his companion to hear; "you've been long enough at the eats. Come on."

"Where's the kid?" asked another.

"He'll be out in a minute, and then we'll finish up this business, and get back to New York."

"Finish up!" whispered the farmer hoarsely. "I wonder if they're going to do away with the poor little chap."

"They wouldn't dare!" declared Larry. "But I can't understand what they mean by going back to New York. I should think that would be the very place they'd keep away from."

"Look! Look!" suddenly exclaimed the farmer,

pointing toward the house. Larry saw a strange sight.

From the lonely house came bursting a small boy, and to the startled gaze of Larry he seemed very much like the pictures of the stolen Lorenzo. Forth he came, and darted away across the deep grass of the yard.

"There he goes!" cried the tramp leader. "Get after him now, and see how long it takes to catch him!"

The tramps about the fire sprang to their feet, and were off after the fleeing lad.

"By heck! I can't stand this!" fairly shouted Mr. Meldron. "I don't care where the others are, I'm going to close in."

"So am I!" yelled Larry, as he saw a good chance to rescue the stolen lad.

The farmer raised his gun in the air, and fired. At the sound of it the tramps looked back in alarm, and the boy ceased running.

"Go on! Go on!" yelled Larry. "We're going to save you!"

A second later another shot was fired.

"There they are!" cried Mr. Meldron. "That's Bob's gun! Now we'll close in on 'em!"

He and Larry rushed forward. At the same time, from behind the house, came the others of the posse. The tramps and their young captive were surrounded.

But a strange thing happened. The boy who had ceased running, did not appear to be at all

frightened or alarmed. Instead a puzzled look came over his face, as it did over the faces of the tramps. They stood grouped together, and a man came out from the old house, and called :

"What's the matter there?"

"You'll find out what's the matter!" replied Bob Nestor savagely. "We've got you just where we want you. Surrender in the name of the law!"

"Surrender? What for? Are you crazy?" demanded the man on the porch of the old house. "What are you after, anyhow?"

"That boy! The stolen boy!" burst out the constable. "We have come for him, and we're going to have him. Surrender, I tell you," and he brought his gun to bear.

"Say, put that weapon aside!" exclaimed the man, and Larry, as he caught the smooth and cultivated accents in his voice, began to understand something that had been puzzling him. At the same time he felt a sense of great disappointment.

"Do you give up the boy?" cried Bob.

"Give him up! I guess not! Are you crazy?"

Some of the tramps were laughing now, and, as for the boy, he was smiling.

"Give him up or we'll take him!" threatened Mr. Meldron. "We know all about him, and we're going to have him and restore him to his mother."

"Oh, are you?" coolly asked the man on the porch. "Well, you won't have far to go to do

that, seeing that she's here. Alice!" he called, and a well-dressed lady came out on the stoop. Her face wore a puzzled expression.

"Gentlemen, I don't know who you are," went on the man on the porch smoothly, "but this lady is my wife, and that is my son, whom you talk of taking away. I guess you've made a mistake."

"What? Ain't he the kidnapped son of Madame Androletti?" demanded the constable, much crestfallen.

"Not a bit of it," came the firm answer, "though I don't mind admitting that this is a kidnapping play."

"A play?" cried Mr. Meldron.

A man came around the corner of the house, carrying a box-like arrangement on a tripod. At the sight of it the farmer who had brought Larry to the lonely house cried out:

"Lay low, fellers! There's their cannon."

"Cannon!" exclaimed Larry, who now understood it all. "That's no cannon. It's a moving-picture camera."

"Moving-picture camera!" gasped the constable.

"You've guessed it," said the man on the porch, "and now, if you're through trying to rescue some one who doesn't need to be rescued, perhaps you'll be good enough to stand aside so we can go on with our acting, and make some reels of film."

"Acting!" cried Mr. Meldron. "They're actors instead of tramps!"

"That's it," came in a chorus from the ragged men, and one of them took off his false beard and waved it gaily at the group of puzzled and chagrined farmers.

"We've come on a wild-goose chase," murmured Larry, "though I can't blame Mr. Meldron for being suspicious of what he saw. "They were only making a moving-picture play, after all."

"Perhaps you'll explain why you came near spoiling our act?" suggested the man, evidently the manager.

"I will," offered Larry. "It was a natural mistake, as I think you will agree."

He then detailed the circumstances; how Mr. Meldron had seen the boy fleeing down the road, pursued by the tramps, and carried into the lonely house.

"Mr. Meldron met me by accident," Larry went on, "and as I am working on the Androletti case for a newspaper, I naturally, as did he, jumped to the conclusion that we had stumbled on a kidnapping case."

"So you have," spoke an actor, "only it wasn't the right kind. I'm sorry we disappointed you."

"So am I," admitted Larry ruefully. He then told how the raid had been planned, and its unexpected outcome was apparent to all.

"My wife and son and I have a small theatrical troupe for making moving-picture plays," explained the head actor, who proved to be a Mr. Blake. "We go to different places about the

country in the vicinity of New York, to get the proper scenic background.

"A play, involving the capture of a boy, and his attempt to escape from some tramps, was needed. I heard of this old house here, and, as it had the right kind of surroundings, and was lonely enough, I brought my troupe here. We have been sort of camping out, for we needed a day or two to rehearse the scenes before we took the pictures. That's what we've been doing, and we are about finished. I don't blame you gentlemen for thinking it was the real thing. It's a credit to our acting. If we had known you were coming we could have arranged to work you into a scene. Maybe it's not too late yet. You might be a rescue party. Will you?"

"I think not," said Larry. "We've been disappointed enough as it is, and these gentlemen want to get home to their dinners. We'll leave you to finish your play in peace."

"Sorry we can't have a real kidnapped boy for you," went on Mr. Blake, "but I can't spare Edgar," and he nodded toward his son.

"No, indeed!" exclaimed the lad's mother. "Oh, but I am so sorry for Mrs. Androletti! I know her slightly, and I do hope you succeed in finding her son for her," she said to Larry.

"I've got to begin all over again," the young reporter said with a rueful smile. "My hopes are all shattered. But I can at least have a story out of it."

"It wasn't your fault at all," said Mr. Meldron, as he walked away at Larry's side, when they had bidden the troupe of actors good-by. "I shouldn't have jumped to conclusions so quick-like. I'm wuss than a kid, I guess."

"No, I think you were justified," spoke Larry. "It certainly did look suspicious. I hope you won't mind being written up in the paper—you and the others."

"Not a bit of it! It's the least we can do for you after fooling you on a fake kidnapping," said the constable.

"And to think them fellers was acting all the while!" murmured one farmer. "Gosh, but they fooled us!"

CHAPTER XV

A NEW CLEW

"WELL, I wonder what I'm going to do next?" said Larry aloud as he walked over the fields beside Mr. Meldron. The other farmers were straggled out, talking excitedly over what had happened.

"I know one thing you're goin' t' do fust!" said the man who was responsible for the whole affair.

"What?" asked Larry curiously.

"Come home t' dinner with me. It's th' least I kin do for you, after all th' trouble I put you to, an' if your stomach is anything like mine it's playin' tag with your backbone, it's that lonesome and empty."

"That about describes my condition," admitted the young reporter, with a laugh. "But I don't want to trouble your wife. I can find some restaurant around here, I guess."

"Nary a one. But shucks, that ain't no trouble. My wife allers cooks enough for a whole fambily, when there's only me and her. Come right along, or I'll be more disappointed than I was when I

found them fellers was actors instid of tramps with a kidnapped boy, though I'm glad he wasn't after all."

"So am I," agreed Larry, with a laugh. He looked back, and saw the troupe of moving-picture players going through the scene where the boy makes another attempt to escape from the house of the tramps. The moving-picture camera was in full operation, and it was this machine which Mr. Meldron had mistaken for a cannon.

Later on Larry had the pleasure of seeing reproduced the moving pictures of the drama in which he played such a strange part. It gave him a queer sensation to see thrown on the screen the views of the pretended tramps, and the little boy running away from them.

"It isn't everybody who tries to break up a photo-play drama," mused the young reporter.

He had a good meal at the house of the farmer, and then, seeking the nearest telephone, he sent in to the *Leader* a humorous account of what had happened. Even though, in a way, it was a disappointment, Larry got a good story out of it, and, what is more, a "beat." The account was copied in several papers.

"Say, there's no use trying to get ahead of Larry Dexter," lamented Peter Manton, when he saw the story in the *Leader*. "Even when he has a slip-up he manages to 'scoop' all the rest of us by it. I've a good notion to quit the game."

"If you don't turn in a good story pretty soon,

you'll quit whether you want to or not," said the city editor of the *Scorcher* significantly.

Peter went out with a fierce determination to unearth new clues to the stolen boy and beat Larry, but his efforts amounted to nothing.

"Well, Larry," said Mr. Emberg one day, some little time after the raid on the moving-picture players, "what are you going to do next to locate the stolen boy?"

"I don't know," the young reporter admitted frankly. "I am about ready to give up. Don't you want to put someone else on the case? I don't seem to be making good. Maybe if a new fellow took hold he could see some things I can't."

"Larry, you're going to stick right on this case until you find that boy, or until—well, until it's been proven that he can't be found," said the city editor. "Don't imagine for a moment that the *Leader* isn't satisfied with your work. You're doing fine. Even when there's a balk, you get a good yarn out of it. Don't be discouraged. I merely asked to see if you had any ideas of a new line to work on."

"Well, I don't mind admitting that I haven't," said Larry. "I don't know which way to turn next."

"You're no worse off than the police," was the comment of Mr. Emberg. "They can't get any clues, either."

"But we want to do better than the police," said Larry.

"You did in the bank case, and you did the time you found Mr. Potter," went on Mr. Emborg. "You'll win out yet, Larry. Don't get discouraged."

The young reporter tried not to be, but it was hard work. For, with all his efforts, he could not seem to get a single new clew to work on. And the old ones had been run into the earth.

"If only something would happen!" complained Larry. "I don't see why the kidnappers (or the kidnapper if there's only one) haven't made a demand for ransom money. They didn't take that boy away merely for the sake of his company. They want to make something out of him.

"But they're as silent as the grave. Not a word or a sign from them. They may be hidden here in New York, or they may be on the other side of the earth. There's no telling."

Indeed, it was not strange that Larry should be baffled. Even the detectives were all at sea. New York had been gone over as if with a fine tooth comb. Every quarter of the city had been searched, clew after clew had been followed up, suspicious characters by the score had been arrested, but still there was no trace of Lorenzo Androletti. He had disappeared as completely as if he had sunk below the surface of the earth, or as if he had gone up in a balloon.

Nor was there any trace of Parloti. The pieces of the torn note he had left behind after his flight furnished the only clew to him, and this clew was

not sufficient to locate him. Nor were his tools—those two mysterious men—found, though a diligent search was made for them.

"Everything is up in the air," complained Larry, as he thought over the various ends of the case. "I can't get hold of anything to work on."

Meanwhile Madame Androletti's grief grew more keen each day that went by without tidings of her son. She lived in retirement, seeing only a few persons, of whom Larry was one.

He called often, not that he had good news to impart, but, somehow, hoping against hope, that perhaps, after all, the mother might be the first to hear good news. But there was no word from Lorenzo.

A number of private detectives had been engaged on the case, as well as the members of the regular police force, but they had not been as successful as had Larry. They spent large sums in traveling about, and Madame Androletti paid them gladly, but it amounted to nothing.

Occasionally they stumbled on what they thought was a clew, and there would be great hopes, but everything fizzled out, and they were forced to admit that they were mistaken.

Of all the New York papers, the *Leader* alone gave much space to the kidnapping case. And for this the sheet was laughed at, and made the butt of editorials by rivals.

"That's all right, Larry," said Mr. Emberg, when a particularly sarcastic editorial had ap-

peared in the *Scorcher*. "They are only jealous because you've beaten them so much. Keep at it."

"If I only could, Mr. Emberg! If only I could get hold of a new clew!"

And then, most unexpectedly, it came.

Larry was in the city room of the *Leader* one afternoon, finishing up a Sunday supplement story that he had worked on during his spare time, when the telephone rang.

"Some one for you, Mr. Dexter," announced a copy boy.

Larry took the instrument, and, no sooner had he listened to the first few words than a change came over his face.

"Yes! Yes!" he said eagerly. "I'll be right up!"

He ran over to Mr. Emberg, and whispered:

"It's a new clew! Madame Androletti has just received a letter from her son!"

CHAPTER XVI

OFF FOR THE WEST

LARRY was fairly scrambling into his coat, which he seldom wore around the office. He caught up his hat, and jabbed a bunch of copy paper, for notes, into his pocket.

"A letter from the stolen boy," repeated the city editor.

"That's what Madame Androletti says. It just came, by mail, and she called me up at once. Say, it may be a good clew, and it may pan out to be nothing; but it's a story, anyhow!"

"That's so," agreed Mr. Emborg. "Get right after it, Larry, and telephone in, to catch the last edition."

"I will!" cried the young reporter as he hurried from the city room.

All the way up in the subway to Madame Androletti's house, Larry was thinking of what might be the outcome of the new clew. He had not asked many questions over the wire for two reasons: One was that he wanted to have a personal talk with the singer as soon as possible, and the other was the fear that some listening ear

on the maze of telephone wires might catch the secret, and "tip off" some newspaper. Larry was very cautious when it came to exclusive stories.

Goegi, the maid, admitted him to the apartments of the singer. Larry found Madame Androletti much excited.

"Oh, I am so glad you are here!" she cried, shaking hands with the young reporter. "It seems an age since I telephoned you. I think we are on the right track at last."

"Have you really a letter from your son?" asked Larry. "Are you sure it is from him? Is it not some terrible joke?"

"It is the handwriting of Lorenzo," said the singer with a happy smile on her face, as she held out a scrap of paper. "I would know his writing among a thousand, and, besides, he uses a pet name for me that no one else would ever think of. Oh, it is from dear Lorenzo, surely enough. And now to find him. Where do you think he is?"

"I haven't the least idea," said Larry.

"Away out West. Among the cowboys and Indians!"

"Cowboys and Indians!" exclaimed the reporter.

"Yes, I'm sure there must be buffaloes out there, too, for I have looked up the place on a map, and there is a city called Buffalo, not far from where my dear, lost boy posted this letter. Oh, I have read of your terrible Indians; and your

cowboys, the brave fellows! If they have my son he is sure to be safe."

"But in what part of the West is he?" asked Larry. "There are not many Indians left in this country. Of course there are plenty of cowboys, but the buffaloes are about exterminated. Where is Lorenzo?"

"Here is the letter!" exclaimed the anxious mother. "The postmark on the envelope is Detroit."

"Detroit! In Michigan!" cried Larry. "Near the dividing point between Lake Huron and Lake Erie. So they have taken him out to the Great Lakes' region. Well, it is something to know where to start to look for him,"

"The lakes! The lakes!" murmured the singer. "Do you think they took him there to——"

She did not finish.

"Now don't worry!" exclaimed Larry heartily. "He is in no danger from those lakes, any more than he would be from the waters around New York."

"But the Indians! The buffaloes! Will the cowboys be able to save him from them?"

"All the Indians and cowboys in Detroit are in the theaters, or moving-picture plays," said Larry, with a laugh. "As for the buffaloes, there aren't any. But let me read the letter."

Quickly he took it from the envelope. It was but a single sheet of paper, evidently torn from

some parcel, for it was creased and worn. It began:

“Dear Andyetti:”

“That’s his pet name for me,” said the fond mother. “It’s a sort of mannish name, and when—when his dear father died, I had to be both parents to him. That’s how we made up the name.”

“I see,” spoke Larry softly.

Then he went on with the letter.

“Oh, how I miss you. A bad man took me away. We came far in the train. He got me in the theater. I tried many times to write to you, but they stopped me. Now I am in a big city, in a little room. It is not in a nice place. From my window I can see big chimneys, and not much else. I do not like the things they give me to eat. They are bad to me. Oh, when will you come for me? I am writing this with a little bit of pencil I have saved for a long time. I am going to throw it out of the window, and I hope some good person will pick it up and mail it to you.

“I have no money, not even a postage stamp. I will make an envelope of some of this wrapping paper, and stick it together with paste made from some bread crumbs.

“Oh, Andyetti, how I want you! Come and get me!

“Your LORENZO.”

Larry's eyes were moist as he finished reading the childish letter. And yet it was not so childish, either. It was as full of grief as if a man had penciled it, for the boy was wise beyond his years, having had a good education, and being naturally bright.

"Well, what do you think?" cried Madame Androletti, as Larry finished reading the letter.

"I think it is from your boy," he said slowly, "and that he is held captive in Detroit."

"Can you find him?"

"That's another question. I'm going to make a big try. I'll start West at once."

"But is not Detroit a big city? How can you find him in a big place?"

"By searching. I'll go down in the tenement district, and look for a place where I can see big chimneys. Probably there are a number of such locations—factory districts—but by keeping at it I will find him."

"Unless they take him away again. They have evidently been traveling with him about the country."

"Yes," admitted Larry. "Well, I'll get on the trail as soon as I can. Where is the envelope in which this came?"

The singer handed it to him. It was rudely made, and yet with a certain childish skill. Folded from a piece of the same paper on which the pleading note was written! Pasted together with

water and bread crumbs! The postmark was clearly Detroit.

"How do you imagine he mailed it?" asked the mother.

"He must have simply addressed it, and tossed it out of the window," spoke Larry. "Some one picked it up, and kindly placed a stamp on it, for it is clear that your son had none."

"That is so. Oh, if I but knew who mailed it I would reward them!"

"I may find out when I go West," said the young reporter. "How did you get the letter?"

"It came to me with much other mail, that had been forwarded from the music hall. That was my last business address. Lorenzo remembered it, brave little chap!"

"And a good thing he did, though I guess if a letter had been marked merely with your name it would have reached you, since you are quite a celebrity since this—this happened."

"Yes, unfortunately. Oh, but if I can get Lorenzo back, I will never let him out of my sight again!"

Once more Larry read the letter and looked at the envelope. He could see, in fancy, what had happened. The stolen boy, in his lonely room, a captive, had managed to get hold of a stump of pencil and a scrap of paper. Then he had written his tearful message, and dropped it out of a window, hoping against hope he must have been that it would be picked up and mailed.

"And I wonder where he is now?" thought Larry. "Have they kept him in Detroit, or have they crossed the lakes, and gone into Canada with him? Oh, if I could only locate and rescue him!"

"You say you will go West?" asked Madame Androletti eagerly.

"At once!" exclaimed Larry. "I'll leave for Detroit to-night, and I'll do all I can to find your son, and the men who have him."

"Never mind those men! Get me back Lorenzo!" she pleaded.

Larry began to make hasty plans. First of all he must telephone in the story. This he did from a 'phone in the room of the singer, describing the letter, and dictating it over the wire.

"Another 'beat,' " mused Larry, as he hung up the receiver of the instrument. "They are coming thick and fast. I only hope I don't fall down on the big one—when I get the stolen boy!"

The clew he had to work on was slender indeed. Merely that the stolen boy was in Detroit, and Detroit was no small city in which to search.

"But I'll find him!" cried Larry. "I'll find him if it takes a year of searching!"

"Well," asked the city editor, as the young reporter again entered the office of the *Leader*, "what do you think of it?"

"Lots; I'm going West at once. I think I'm on the right trail at last. I'll get that boy—or help the police to do the trick!"

CHAPTER XVII

ON THE LAKES

LARRY was not long in making his arrangements for the trip West. Hurrying home with a copy of the late edition of the *Leader*, containing his story of the stolen boy's letter, the young reporter began packing his clothes in a suit-case.

"Where to now, Larry?" asked his mother. "Oh, it does seem that you haven't any home life at all, lately. What with the bank mystery, and now this stolen-boy case, I hardly see you at all."

"And he doesn't play with me, either!" added little James.

"Well, I think this is the beginning of the end," remarked Larry, as he went on with his packing. "I think I'll bring back the stolen boy with me, mother."

"Do you really mean it, Larry?"

"Well, I think I'm on the best clew I've struck yet," he answered, as he showed his mother the paper containing the story of the letter. "It looks very promising."

"Oh, I hope it proves so!" Mrs. Dexter exclaimed. "I can feel for his poor mother. The

anxiety must be terrible. Oh, Larry, go, and bring him back. I'll never say a word, no matter how long you stay away, if you can only find that boy. Only come home as soon as you do find him."

"As fast as steam and electricity can bring us!" he cried cheerfully. "But there, I mustn't be too hopeful, for, after all, I may fall down on this, as I did in the moving-picture play, though I don't consider that was altogether my fault."

"Do you really think the letter was written by the boy?" asked Larry's sister Lucy.

"Oh, yes, there's no doubt of that. His mother knows Lorenzo's handwriting. It was mere luck that some one found his letter, after he threw it out of the window, and mailed it. It might, just as easily, have lain in the street unnoticed. Or, worse still, those who are holding him a prisoner might have found it, and then they would have taken extra precautions, so that he never could have sent word of where he is."

"Hadn't you better hurry more, Larry?" suggested his mother. "I should think you'd fairly want to fly out there, before those men move on with the poor boy again."

"I do wish they had an airship service out to the lakes, but, as matters stand, I don't believe there is need of any special rush."

"Why not?"

"Well, I think that those fellows have picked out a place where they are going to stay for some

time with the boy. Evidently they've been on the move with him, up to now, or else they've held him captive in some lonely place where he couldn't get a chance to send his mother any word. For he's a smart boy, and in the time he's been kept away he would have found opportunity to do something to give us a clew, except it was utterly impossible.

"So that's why I think they're likely to keep him in Detroit for some time, and though I'm not going to waste many hours, I'm not going to go off on a rush. I think I'll go by boat, instead of train, even though it's slower. I like the water, and it will give me a chance to see something of the great lakes."

"Why do you think they picked out Detroit?" asked Mrs. Dexter.

"Well, it's hard to say," answered Larry. "Perhaps they wanted to be in a position to escape by land or water if they found the police on their trail. Then, too, they may have gone from New York to Buffalo, and have taken a boat there for Detroit. Any way so as to break the trail. But I think I'm on it just the same," and the young reporter concluded his packing with more hope in his heart than he had had in some time.

Larry had made a copy of the boy's letter, and this he now looked at again, before bidding his family good-by for what might be a long time.

"Big chimneys," mused Larry. "He says he can see big chimneys from his window, and not

much else. I've got to look for chimneys, first of all."

With plenty of expense money in his pocket, and arrangements made so that he could get more in Detroit, Larry started off on his trip along the Great Lakes. He was to go by train to Buffalo, and, as it was nearly night when he got started, he took a sleeper.

Little of interest occurred on the trip West. The train was on time, and in due course Larry found himself on one of the largest of the steamers on Lake Erie.

The weather was fine, and Larry really began to enjoy himself, as he sat on deck. Though he was filled with anxiety over the plight of the stolen boy, and though he realized that much depended on himself in rescuing the lad, still the young reporter would not allow his thoughts to become gloomy.

"I'll just think of this as a sort of vacation," he said. "I can't really do anything until I get to Detroit, and maybe I'll be a long while there before I can get on the right track. So I'll take it easy while I can."

Certainly Larry was entitled to it, for he had worked hard on the case up to now, and there was much of danger and hard work ahead of him still. Then, too, he had not had much of a respite from the Wall Street bank mystery, which was one of the most baffling cases the young reporter had ever been called on to solve.

So it is no wonder that he began to take a little enjoyment out of the lake trip. It was simply a case of where he could do nothing, for there was nothing to do.

"Just the same, I'd like to know whether they brought the boy over this route?" Larry mused, as he looked at the waters of the lake, sparkling in the sun.

"Just think of it, they may have even come on this same steamer. That's something I hadn't thought of. I must look that up. The purser ought to know. I'll have a talk with him."

Larry laughed to himself. It was not five minutes ago that he had made a sort of vow that he would not worry or do any work until he got to Detroit, and here he was making labor for himself.

But he knew better than to leave the slightest thread loose, and when, by so simple a means as asking questions, he could learn whether or not the kidnappers had been on this steamer, he decided to do it.

The purser, however, could give him no information. He was obliging enough about it when Larry asked him, and went over his records from the date when Lorenzo was stolen down to the last trip. But, though innumerable boys appeared on the passenger list, none bore a description tallying with that of Madame Androletti's son. Nor could the purser, who had not missed a trip on the

boat in that time, recall any suspicious persons taking a boy away.

"Well, I've settled that much, anyhow," thought Larry, as he turned in for the night. "Now to wait until I get to Detroit, and then—the tall chimneys. What a queer clew to locate a stolen boy?"

Larry slept peacefully, in spite of his busy brain that would not stop thinking of the case on which he was engaged. He awoke, after a trip along the Detroit River, to find Detroit looming up in the distance.

"Well, I'm ready for you!" he exulted, as he paced the deck. "If you're there, Lorenzo, I'll have you out of the hands of those scoundrels if it's at all possible."

But, in spite of his rather boastful words, the young reporter knew that he had the hardest part of his task still before him.

"Now, let's see, where had I best begin?" mused Larry, as he went ashore. "First of all, to establish headquarters. I'll go to a good hotel and put up there. Then to look for the little room with a view of only chimneys. Poor little chap! What a dreary time it must be for him. And why in the world haven't those kidnappers done something before this? Why haven't they made a demand for money—for a ransom? What is their object in keeping so silent?"

And in spite of himself, Larry felt a sense of

fear and danger that he would not even give a place to in his thoughts.

"No, it can't be!" he exclaimed. "Lorenzo is alive, and I'll get him!"

From then on there were busy days for Larry Dexter. He at once began a tour of the city, looking for tall chimneys, and he found them plentiful. But he used a sort of process of elimination. That is, he would locate the chimneys, and then, by making a careful observation of the neighborhood, he would learn whether or not there were boarding houses, or furnished rooms for people in moderate circumstances, there. In many cases there were not, and that meant that Lorenzo, in all probability, was not there.

"For it's certain that the kidnappers aren't in any fancy hotel," decided Larry. "They're in the tenement district, most likely, and that's why the poor boy doesn't get much to eat. Those fellows are keeping under cover, and the best place for them is in one of the human beehives."

Several days passed—they lengthened into a week—and Larry was as far from success as at first. Madame Androletti had become so impatient at the lack of good news that she came on to Detroit to stay, and Larry reported to her every day. In spite of his lack of progress the singer did not lose confidence in him, and, even when he suggested it, she would not call in the police or private detectives.

"For why should I?" she asked. "Up to now

they have not been anywhere nearly as successful as you, Larry, and should I trust them now? No! I will leave it to you. But, oh, Larry, find him soon for me—soon!” and tears filled her eyes.

Into one factory district after another Larry carried his search. Tenement after tenement he visited, taking in turn those where particular nationalities herded together.

“If they were Italians who have the boy they might go in with their own kind, or they might pick out a place where none of their countrymen were,” reasoned Larry. “It’s hard to know just what to think. I’ve just got to keep on searching.”

Several times he hired a small motorboat and went for a cruise, for he loved the water. Nor were these excursions without an object, for he made inquiries along the water front, and of all sorts of lake characters, as to whether they had seen anything of a suspicious looking man or men with a frightened Italian boy. But none had.

“Well, I’m not making much progress,” thought Larry one evening, after a day of hard work and fruitless inquiry. “But better luck to-morrow.” And, strangely enough, his luck did turn.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DESERTED ROOM

"WELL, this looks like a street that would have lots of factory chimneys on it," said Larry the next morning, as he stood at the head of a busy thoroughfare. "Tenement houses, too. Lots of 'em, and, very likely, furnished rooms and boarding places. This is the most promising place I've struck yet."

In accordance with a sort of plan he had formed, Larry first located the largest cluster of tall chimneys. Then he picked out a tenement house, and went at once to the rear of it, where he knew there would be outside stairways, as is always the case.

"I want a view from there," he said.

No one interfered with him, or spoke to him, as he made his way through the hall. Children swarmed about, as they always do in these places. The advent of strangers into a tenement house was too common to excite observation. For were not inspectors of one sort or another always coming in, or rent collectors, or the man who collected installments on the furniture?

So, instead of bringing out a curious crowd, the entrance of a stranger into a tenement of the common kind was more apt to send the dwellers into their rooms, behind locked doors. For it is often convenient to pretend to be out when the rent collector, or installment man, calls.

But Larry cared little for what the people did. He wanted to get a view from the rear of this tenement. Then, if it was at all promising, he could begin to make inquiries.

And to Larry's delighted surprise the view, while a most gloomy one from a scenic standpoint, was just what he wanted. As he looked from the topmost rear porch of the tenement, he could see little else but chimneys, tall stacks and short ones, big and little—a veritable forest of brick and sheet-iron stacks.

“Well, this is the best place I’ve struck yet!” the young reporter exclaimed. “Now to make some inquiries.” He knew two ways of doing this—both good. One was to interview the children, and the other was to apply at the nearest small grocery.

For, if you ever want to know anything that has happened in a tenement, ask the children about it. If that doesn’t give you the information, try the grocery.

Larry began his inquiries at the grocery first, and the keeper of it, a shrewd Hebrew, had the history of every family in the neighboring tenement down “pat.” It was part of his business, for

he did a big credit trade; that is, big in the number of persons he trusted.

Yes, there were in the building several Italian boys of the age of the one Larry sought. But whether they were strangers from New York, the grocer could not say. There were suspicious looking men, too. There always were, but who could say they were the ones wanted. Then Larry got down to "brass tacks," as he called it.

"Do you happen to know whether there is a boy held captive in a rear room of the tenement?" asked Larry.

"A captiff! Vor why should I?" exclaimed the Hebrew with a shrug of his shoulders. "I haf not zeen him. I know not."

"I've got to make a sort of house-to-house canvass," thought Larry. "Let's see. How can I do it? Guess I'll be a sort of inspector for the time being. I'll be looking for sick children. That will be a safe play. I'll use my fire badge."

He had one that he had used to gain admission inside the fire lines in New York. Pinning this on his coat, the young reporter started to knock on doors in the tenement, beginning on the second floor, for from the lower rear rooms no view of the chimneys could be had, and it was on this view that the young reporter relied.

His harmless masquerade as an inspector of sick children worked well. Most of the youngsters were at school, but there were plenty at home, and many were ill. Larry pretended to

make notes about them, and some women took him for a doctor.

One poor mother demanded medicine for a sick baby, and Larry's heart was sore at the misery he met with. In one case he gave a half-starving woman money enough for a week's food at least, and so, though he had no right to assume the character he did, there was no harm in it, and eventually good came of it.

But he was not meeting the success for which he hoped. Inquiry after inquiry he made, but he did not find a trace of the stolen boy. He got to the top floor. Some of the apartments were vacant; the tenants had been dispossessed, Larry was told. There was but one set of rooms left at which to inquire, and these were on the rear of the house.

"This is my last chance!" thought Larry. "But still there are other tenements, and other places where there are many chimneys. I'm not giving up yet."

He knocked. The door was opened by a woman, who eyed him suspiciously.

"I am inspecting for sick children," said Larry, the phrase he had been using. "Have you any?"

"I have no children. There are none here. Go away!"

"Have there been any?" asked Larry in desperation, slipping his foot in the crack of the door, so that it could not be closed. "I'm looking for an Italian boy, about ten or twelve years old.

Have you seen one—in company with some men?”

The woman started. She looked more closely at Larry.

“Maybe you was a detective?” she asked quickly.

“Well, sort of, if you like to call me that,” admitted the young reporter, his heart beating suddenly with new hope. “Why?”

“Come in,” she said, and Larry entered the squalid apartment.

“You was looking for this Italian boy, yes?”

“I am!” cried Larry. “Tell me quickly, have you seen him? Was he here?”

“Sure he was here, but he has went.”

“Gone? When?”

“Two days ago. I am sure he is the one what you is wantin’. He was a quiet little feller an’ he was much afraid of the young mans who had him. The little feller, he cry lots. I hear him in the nights, but I dast not do anything. I am afraid. I am afraid efen now to speak mit you, but if you are a detective, you know—you will not let harm come. But he is gone, that little feller, an’ the ones who had him.”

“Where have they gone?” exclaimed Larry.

“I doan’t know.”

“Where were they? In here?”

“No; but you should listen. There is two back rooms on this floor that are not in with mine. They rent separate. Comes here some time ago

a boy and two young mans. The boy is sick, I t'ink. He says nothing. I see them go in the back rooms, for the agent of the house leaves mit me the keys yet. I open the rooms for them. I say to one of them: 'That your boy, mister?' What he say? Ha! He say to me to keep still, an' not bodder him. I keep still, but now they are gone, I speak. I am sure something is wrong."

"And so am I!" cried Larry. "Oh, but I'm too late! Look, is that the boy?" and he showed her a picture of Lorenzo.

"That is hm! That is him!" she cried. "Oh, the poor little feller. Who is he?"

"Never mind that now," spoke Larry. "I'll tell you later. But where did they go? Did no one see them? Can I have a look in the rooms?"

"For sure you can. I have the keys from the agent of this house. But I know not when those two go—the boy and that man with the bad eyes. One man is only here one day. In the night they go. Listen, detective man: The boy he is never allowed to go out at all. He is kept in the rooms by the bad man. Sometimes another comes—another man—an' he stays while the first one goes out to buy things to eat; but not much, mind you. Never do they leave that boy alone.

"Sometimes I listen in the nights, and I hears him cry, so sad like. For many years I am sorry that I haf no childrens of my own, but when I hears this boy cryin', I am glad, for I would not like that one of my little ones should suffer so.

Oh, it was sad!" and her honest eyes filled with tears.

"Why did they leave so quickly?" asked Larry. "Did any one scare them away?"

"I know not. Listen, you: One night I hear a noise in the hall, a sort of crying noise. I peek out of my door, and I see them leading the little boy away."

"Why didn't you say something—stop them?" cried Larry. "That boy was stolen from his mother! I have been looking all over for him!"

"Stolen! Oh, what a shamefulness! But I did not dare stop them. Listen, you: I live here all alone, and there were two evil men with that boy. In the darkness of the night they took him away, and he comes not back. The rooms are empty."

"Took him away!" cried Larry softly. "I'm too late! Now I may never find him."

He thought rapidly for a few moments.

"Let me see the room where he was held a prisoner," he requested of the woman.

"For certainly, yes," she assented. "I show you."

Taking a key down from a nail on the wall, she led the way to a sort of passage at the end of the hall. It appeared that when the tenement was built a mistake had been made and two rooms, intended to go in with the apartment which the woman rented, had been shut off from the others by a wall. These rooms later were fitted up to

accommodate two persons. There were a bedroom and a kitchen, with a small bath attached.

"And it's here Lorenzo was held a prisoner!" exclaimed Larry, as he entered the deserted room which, the woman said, had been used by the boy. The place was not clean, and it was in disorder. The bed was not made, and there were scraps of food all about.

"Poor little feller!" murmured the sympathetic woman.

"Yes," agreed Larry. "Oh, if I could only have found him before! But perhaps it's not too late yet. If I could only find some sort of a clew to where they have gone! But I'm all at sea again."

He gazed about the room. There was little that seemed to offer any hint as to where the men had taken the stolen boy. The kidnappers would see to that. And yet they might have overlooked something—something that would tell Larry what he wanted to know.

"They must have found out that he dropped the letter from the window," thought the young reporter. "That probably gave them a scare, and they lit out. Tell me," he said to the woman, "was one man, who led the boy away, tall and big?" and he described Parlotti.

"No; he did not look so," she replied: "They were both small men."

"The two whom Parlotti signaled in the theater," decided Larry. "His tools. He makes them

do all the risky work. But what is his object? Why is he delaying? Why doesn't he come out in the open, and demand the money or a share in the property as the price for returning the boy? I can't understand it."

Larry walked back and forth in the deserted room. The woman opened a window to air the place. A little breeze sprang up and blew about the litter on the floor. A piece of paper landed at Larry's feet.

Idly he picked it up. At once he knew it for the same kind of wrapping paper on which Lorenzo had written his letter. Larry turned the scrap over. To his surprise, it showed writing.

There, as if it stared up at him, he read this:

You Ron
 Lorenzo.

"By Jove! Maybe this means something!" cried the young reporter.

CHAPTER XIX

CRUISING ABOUT

"WHAT is it? What have you found?" asked the woman, whose name, Larry learned, was Mrs. Christensen. "Is it something to tell about the poor little feller?"

"I hope so," replied Larry. "It's signed with his name, anyhow. But I can't understand what 'You Ron' means."

"'You Ron,'" repeated Mrs. Christensen. "Why it's a reg'lar Chinese laundry name."

"It does look like that," admitted Larry.

"Maybe the villyans have him hid away in one of them Chinese places," she suggested. "There's lots of 'em hereabouts."

"Perhaps," said Larry. He was looking at the scrap of paper as though it might speak and tell him what he wanted to know.

"'You Ron,'" he murmured over and over again. "'You Ron.' I wonder what in the world that means? The boy wouldn't have taken the trouble to write it, and put his name to it unless it meant something. He had to do it in a hurry, too, for it's rather scrawled. And then he dropped

it here, in all the litter, thinking and hoping that some one would find it, and guess what it meant. I only wish I could know what it means, for I'm sure it stands for something."

Larry gazed at the scrap of paper. He turned it over and over. He looked at it upside down. He even held it up in front of a cracked looking-glass on the wall, for sometimes written characters, made by a reversed process, or backwards, can be read by holding them in front of a mirror. Not so with this one, however. It was as much of a puzzle one way as the other.

"Don't you want to go see some of the Chinamen?" asked Mrs. Christensen. "They're bad, some of 'em, and they may have the poor boy hid away in some of their opium pipes that I've read about."

"Hardly that, I think," said Larry, "and yet——"

Once more he looked at the paper.

"'You Ron,' he repeated over again, sometimes rapidly, and again slowly. Suddenly a changed expression came over his face.

"I think I have it!" he cried.

"Do you mean that piece of paper tells you where the stolen boy is?" asked Mrs. Christensen. "You detective fellers is wonderful wise."

"I don't know about that," spoke Larry. "And I'm not sure that this tells where the stolen boy is. But I've just seen something that I ought to have known as soon as I picked up this bit of paper.

'You Ron'!" he cried. "Don't you see what it means?"

"I can't say that I does," replied Mrs. Christensen. "It sounds like Chinese to me."

"It's the name of the lake!" went on the young reporter, "Lake Huron. That's what Lorenzo meant to write. He must have heard the men speaking of it, and he wrote it down just as it sounded to his Italian ears. 'You Ron,' means Huron sure. I see it now. The kidnappers have taken him on Lake Huron."

"Lake Huron!" gasped the woman. "And do you think they'll drown him there?"

"Not a bit of it!" cried Larry stoutly. "I don't believe they're as desperate as that. They want to escape with him, that's all. And they've gone to Lake Huron. Why didn't I see that at first. 'You Ron' was as near as Lorenzo could come to spelling it, and he left this scrap of paper here for a clew. He's a smart and plucky lad, all right."

"And are you going to Lake Huron after him?" demanded Mrs. Christensen.

"I surely am. But it's a big contract. I guess I'll need a boat, all right. A motorboat for a cruise about the lake, and yet they may have only crossed the lake, to the Canadian side. Oh, why couldn't Lorenzo give me a little more information? But perhaps that was all he had time to write. I've got to make a search on the lakes for him now. But still this shows that he's alive, and fairly well. t I will be some hope for his mother."

"His poor mother! Oh, how sorry I am for her!" exclaimed the woman. "I do hope you can find her boy for her."

"I'm going to make a big try!" exclaimed the young reporter, as he put the scrap of paper away in his pocket-book.

There was nothing more that Larry could learn at the place where the stolen boy had been held captive. With one last glance about the rooms he came away, and, after thanking Mrs. Christensen for the aid she had given, he hastened to tell the news to the waiting mother.

Mrs. Androletti was at once comforted and alarmed. It was joy to her to know that her son was alive. But she was alarmed when Larry spoke of Lake Huron.

"Oh, the terrible water!" she exclaimed. "I know when we came over from Italy, though we were on a great ship, Lorenzo was frightened. He does not like the water, and he never did. I am not afraid of it, but, oh, for him! What shall we do? Where shall we look for him now?"

"Well," remarked Larry, "I suppose one thing is as good as another. I'm all at sea, except for the fact that it is somewhere on Lake Huron that those men have taken your son. They may have only crossed the lake, but, in that case, I think they would have mentioned some city on the other side, or some destination, and Lorenzo would have written that instead of the name of the lake itself,

as nearly as he could catch it. So what I have to propose is this :

"I will engage a small boat, and cruise about looking for him. I can easily hire a motor launch here, and though it may take some time to get on the trail, it is the only thing I see that can be done."

"And I agree with you," spoke Mrs. Androletti. "But suppose they have taken Lorenzo on a long trip, on some big steamer, that goes over all the lakes?"

"I don't believe they would do that," said Larry. "They would be afraid of being discovered. This case has attracted so much attention, there has been so much published about it, and your boy's picture has been in so many papers, that those who have stolen him have to keep under cover with him.

"This is very evident from the fact that they picked out such a poor tenement place to stay with him. No, they won't try to take him on board any of the big steamers. They'll hire a small boat, I think, and keep out on the lake until such time as they can come ashore, and go to some place where they can hide."

"Oh, do you think so?" cried the singer. "But what is their object? Why do they torture me so? Why are they holding my boy from me? Why do they not demand half my fortune? and I would gladly give it to them—yes, all of it. For life is nothing to me without him!"

"I don't know," answered Larry slowly. "I can't imagine what their game is. It's a deep one, I'm sure. All I know is that they have your boy, and that, in all probability, they are out on Lake Huron with him. And I'm going after him."

"And I'm going with you!" cried the singer.

"You?"

"Yes; I can't stand this suspense any longer. I must do something. I will hire the best motor-boat that can be had, and together we will cruise about, looking for my boy. Will you take me with you?"

"I will!" cried Larry, holding out his hands, and Mrs. Androletti clasped them as his own mother might have done.

Larry spent many busy hours. It was not so easy as he had imagined hiring a gasoline launch for an indefinite cruise. He telegraphed to Mr. Emberg, at the *Leader* office, and word came back that he could do whatever he thought best. There was no limit to expense bills, he was told.

Larry was careful about what kind of a boat he selected. And, truth to tell, there was not much choice in craft that were on the market for charter.

"It might be better to buy one," thought the young reporter. "We could use it as long as we wanted, and then sell it again. I'll go look for one for sale."

He went down to the river front, and, as he came near a public dock he saw a boat tied fast

there, which at once took his fancy. She was a "beauty," as he at once characterized her. Of large size, with slanting masts, a raking funnel and her lines were perfect. Between the masts were the wires which indicated that wireless communication could be maintained for some distance, at any rate.

"Oh, if I could only get a boat like that one!" exclaimed Larry, half aloud. "We could go all over Lake Huron in her. But I guess it's out of the question. She certainly is a 'beaut,' though."

He stood on the string-piece of the pier admiring the motor craft. As he took in the various details, and glimpsed into the motor-room through the opened transoms of the trunk cabin, he heard a voice speaking.

"Well, daddy, how long are we going to stay here?" was asked in girlish tones.

Larry started at the sound. Where had he heard that voice before?

"By Jove!" he exclaimed to himself.

A moment later there was a movement in a companionway, and a girlish figure came on deck. For an instant the young lady gazed at Larry Dexter. Then she exclaimed:

"Oh, daddy, you'll never guess who's here!"

"Who?" came a voice from below.

"Our reporter! Larry Dexter. Oh, I'm so glad to see you!" she cried, holding out her hands. "Wherever did you come from, and how did you know that we were going to put in here? You

newspaper men know everything, I believe, and what you don't you always guess at!"

"Grace!" cried Larry. "Grace Potter! Well, I never knew your father had a motor yacht."

"Come on board!" she cried. "We have only had it a little while. We've been cruising about, daddy and I, and now we don't know what to do next. Maybe you can suggest something."

"I can," said Larry quietly, a daring plan coming into his mind.

"Good! Come aboard. Father will be up in a minute. Oh, it seems like hearing from home to see you again, Larry."

The young reporter walked up the gangplank to the deck of the trim motor yacht. Every glimpse he had of her revealed new beauties.

"Glad to see you," murmured Mr. Potter. "You seem to find me, Larry, no matter where I go," and the millionaire, whom Larry had once located, when it seemed that he had disappeared forever, shook hands with our hero.

"And, what do you think, daddy?" exclaimed Grace; "he has a new plan for a cruise for us."

"You have?" exclaimed Mr. Potter. "Let's hear it, Larry; I'd like to run up against something new."

"Then lend me your yacht to trace the stolen boy!" cried Larry suddenly. "That will be something new, and it may furnish plenty of excitement."

"The stolen boy!" murmured Mr. Potter.

"Yes, father, don't you remember? Madame Androletti's son," explained Grace, who was a great reader of the newspapers. "Larry is working on that case."

"I thought you had retired after you solved the bank mystery," spoke the millionaire, with a smile.

"Not quite," answered the young reporter; and then he told of his plans.

"Use my yacht? Of course you can!" cried Mr. Potter, when Larry proffered his request. "I'll run it for you, with my crew. Grace and I will come along, and Madame Androletti can be our guest. We know her slightly. It's great. This is just what I needed.

"I've been taking a vacation, but, so far, it hasn't amounted to much. Now I've got some object. We'll cruise about looking for the scoundrels who have that poor boy. How soon can you come aboard, Larry?"

"As soon as I can get Madame Androletti."

"Then the sooner the better. Wait, I'll go with you, and formally invite her."

"And I'm coming, too," said Grace.

A little later they were with tearful Madame Androletti, who gladly accepted the offer of the millionaire's vessel. She was ready to start at once.

"And now to find the stolen boy!" cried Grace Potter, as she stood on deck with Larry, some time later, as the *Elizabeth*, which was the name

of Mr. Potter's yacht, was churning her way from the dock.

"It may be a longer cruise than you think for," spoke Larry, as he thought of the expanse of Lake Huron.

"I don't care how long it is!" she said, as she smiled at the young reporter. "It will be worth while."

And so the cruise began. How would it end?

CHAPTER XX

CUT ADRIFT

THERE had been little delay in starting off in the *Elizabeth*. She was provisioned for a long cruise, and in charge of a competent crew. There was plenty of gasoline in her tanks, and there were many stations along the lake shore where more could be procured.

"Have you made any plans?" asked Mr. Potter of Larry, when they were well on their way to Lake Huron by the way of Lake St. Clair.

"I can't say that I have," he replied. "You see, I can't tell where the men have gone, taking the boy with them. They may be cruising about on the lake, or they may have headed for the Canadian shore, or some place on this side, where they can stay in hiding."

"That's so, but I agree with you that most likely they have hired some sort of a craft and are steaming about."

"One reason for this is," went on Mr. Potter, "that they would not dare risk going about too publicly, as in a large steamer. They will have to keep under cover, for the appearance of the

stolen boy is well known, by his descriptions that have appeared in the papers, and by his photograph.

"So, if they are out in a boat, they'll very likely put in only at small and isolated ports. And we'll do the same. We'll make a tour of the great lakes, if necessary. I haven't had a vacation in some years, and I'm going to take a good one now."

"I don't know that it will be much of a vacation for you, hunting for a stolen boy," said Larry.

"Yes, it will!" exclaimed the millionaire. "It will be a change for me, and, besides, I want to help Madame Androletti if I can. I have often heard her sing, and I admire her very much. As soon as I get back from this trip, and we have the boy—or, for that matter, whether we get him or not—I'm going to use my influence to have the strongest kind of a law passed, providing for the extreme penalty for kidnapping."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Larry, "and I can assure you that the *Leader* will back up your efforts."

"Thanks. It's always a help to have a good newspaper back of you," spoke the millionaire.

Madame Androletti seemed much improved in spirits as soon as she started on the cruise. While, of course, there was no immediate chance of locating her son, it was a relief to her to be doing something, even though it was but sailing,

about, rather than to sit still, waiting for some news.

"I could not have stood it much longer," she said.

Larry and Mr. Potter talked over their plans. They had come away in a hurry and without much thought of what they had best do. The young reporter sent a story to his paper, telling of finding the deserted room, where Lorenzo had been, and of a new clew he was following. He received an answer back to proceed as he thought best.

"I think we can get on the trail as soon by following along shore, and putting in at various ports, as by any other way," suggested the millionaire. "To my notion, those fellows are not going very far out on the lake. In the first place, I don't believe they have a vessel big enough to weather a hard storm such as we're likely to get any time now, with winter coming on. And in the second place, they can't have any object in crossing Huron.

"They are in this kidnapping business to make money. I'm sure of that. They have been keeping silent up to now, so as to make it all the more agonizing for Madame Androletti. They want to get her in such a state that she'll give in the moment she gets their demand for ransom money. That's why they have not made any advances to her. They are playing a deep game."

"Yes, I believe so," assented Larry. "That Parlotti looked to be a deep plotter."

"And you still think him guilty?"

"Well, I wouldn't like to say. I've been fooled more than once," said Larry, with a smile. "I may be again."

"Of course it's best to be cautious," returned Mr. Potter, "but I'm convinced that Parlotti is at the bottom of this. If we can find him, we'll have the boy."

The cruise continued. The weather was calm, and but for the nervous anxiety of the voyagers it would have been most delightful. Madame Androletti improved in spirits, and, as for Grace Potter, she vied with Larry in keeping watch for suspicious-looking vessels.

But none was seen. Lake steamer after lake steamer was passed, but it was agreed that it would be useless to try to locate Lorenzo on any of these.

"He'll be on a small, disreputable-looking craft, if he's on any," declared Mr. Potter, and Larry assented.

But they saw none of these. They put into port after port, and made thorough inquiries, but with no success. I say with no success, but they did discover some clues.

Several times they heard of a small motor boat that had put in just ahead of them for gasoline or supplies. It was not in good condition, and nearly every place they asked about her, they

heard that she was in some kind of mechanical trouble.

"And she doesn't come to the dock, either," remarked one man who ran a small repair shop near the lake shore. "I know the craft you speak of," he said, in answer to inquiries. "I heard of her from a friend of mine down the lake a way. It seems as if whoever's running her is afraid of letting a repair man come on board. They came to me and told me what was busted. I said I couldn't fix it without I saw it.

"But they wouldn't take me out to her. They came ashore in a small boat, and, after a lot of talk, they bought some motor parts, and said they'd do the repairs themselves."

"What was the name of the boat?" asked Larry.

"She lay so far off shore that I couldn't make it out. Maybe she didn't have a name. Anyhow, I didn't get it. But I'm sure it's the craft you want, all right, though I neither saw nor heard of a boy. I didn't like the looks of the men any too well."

"And she's only about a day ahead of us?" asked Mr. Potter.

"That's about all. If she has more motor trouble she won't be that much. I believe you can catch her."

"We'll try!" cried Larry.

After that the *Elizabeth* was speeded up to her top notch, and fairly foamed through the water.

"It looks like a storm," remarked Larry one night, when, after a hard day's run, they had put in at a small port to learn that the mysterious craft they were chasing had left but a short time before.

"Yes, and but for the coming storm I'd give chase," said Mr. Potter. "But, as it is, I think we'd better tie up for the night. Their boat won't be able to do much in the blow. I say let's tie up, and go on in the morning."

Larry agreed that this was a good plan, and the *Elizabeth* was hove to, and anchored not far from shore. As the occupants of her turned in for the night the wind was rising, and there was a heavy swell on.

It was about midnight when Larry was awakened by an unusual pitching and tossing of the vessel. He was almost thrown out of his bunk.

"Mr. Potter! Something's wrong."

"I should say so!" exclaimed the millionaire. "We've dragged our anchor in the storm, and we're adrift!"

Quickly he sprang from his berth and called some orders to the man on watch. In a few moments the *Elizabeth* was under power, and was moving ahead over the heaving waters of the lake. The mate came down into the cabin.

"Well, what is it?" asked Mr. Potter.

"The captain told me to report to you, sir," he said, "that our cable had been cut. That's why we went adrift."

CHAPTER XXI

IN THE GRIP OF THE STORM

FOR a moment there was silence in the cabin of the *Elizabeth*. Larry, Mr. Potter and the mate stood looking at one another, while on the deck above them sounded the rush and run of many feet, and hoarse calls and orders.

"Cut adrift!" exclaimed Mr. Potter. "Is it possible?"

"No doubt about it, sir," replied the mate. "I saw the cable myself, sir, and it's as clean cut as if some one had used the cook's meat cleaver on it."

"An accident, do you think?"

"I shouldn't like to say, sir. The captain told me to report to you, and to ask you to step up on deck sir, when you could conveniently do so, sir."

"Tell him I'll be there directly."

The millionaire looked at Larry. The young reporter had not spoken during the talk between the owner of the yacht and the mate. Then, as Mr. Potter started toward his stateroom to attire

himself in something more substantial than a bath robe, Larry said:

"Do you think this looks queer, Mr. Potter?"

"I don't know, Larry. That cable was a new one, and good and strong. There's quite a sea on, but not enough to have frayed the strands. And yet he says it was cleanly cut. I must look into this. Come up on deck, if you like, when you've dressed."

"I will," and Larry swung into his own room. The *Elizabeth* was under way now, and her motors were throbbing and turning the screw that churned the water to foam under her stern.

Suddenly a girl's voice called:

"What is it, daddy? Has anything happened? Why are we under way? I thought we had anchored for the night."

"So we did, Grace, but we have decided, to unanchor," spoke her father, with a grim smile at Larry, and a motion to the young reporter to indicate that he was to keep silent regarding the trouble.

"But what does it mean?" she insisted, from behind her closed stateroom door. "Are we in any danger? I'm going to get up. Shall I call Madame Androletti?"

"No! Don't!" her father urged her. Then, under his breath he added: "I don't want to look after any more women folks than I have to in case of trouble. Stay in your room, Grace," he

called to her. "Everything is all right. We'll anchor again soon."

And yet how could he, with the best bower lying at the bottom of the lake, where it remained after the cable was cut?

But the injunction to Grace not to alarm the singer was not necessary. Awakened by the pitching and tossing of the yacht, Madame Androletti called out, as the millionaire started up on deck to join Captain Reardon.

"Oh, what has happened?" she wanted to know. "Are we in any danger?"

"Not the slightest, my dear Madame," replied the millionaire. "We are merely getting an early start, that is all."

But it was useless to try to quiet two women, once their nervous fears were aroused. As Larry came from his room, attired in conventional style, he saw Grace, and the woman whose son he was seeking, come from their rooms together.

"Oh, Larry!" cried the girl. "What is it? Where is my father?"

"He's up on deck, Grace. It's all right. We merely lost our anchor in the storm, and we had to get under way to keep from being tossed on shore. It will be all right."

"Lost our anchor? How?"

"We'll know soon," replied the young reporter, noncommittally. "I'll let you know as soon as I find out for sure. I'm going up on deck."

"In all this storm?" cried Madame Androletti, in some alarm.

"Oh, this isn't bad," laughed Larry. And yet, as he mounted the companion stairway, and had to hold tightly to the rail, so as not to be pitched down on his head, he realized that the storm was rapidly getting worse.

"But I guess *Miss Elizabeth* is a plucky enough girl to weather it," thought Larry grimly. "She will if she's anything like our friend Grace," and he looked back into the cabin to see the millionaire's daughter, with her arms about Madame Androletti, trying to comfort her, and allay the fears of the singer.

Once on deck, though the wind blew with considerable force, it was not quite as bad as Larry had feared. True, there was a heavy sea on, and to those who have never seen the Great Lakes in a storm, let me tell you that a blow there can raise almost as high waves as on the Atlantic or Pacific Oceans. The Great Lakes are lakes only in name—they are really inland seas.

"Here we are, Larry!" called Mr. Potter, as our hero started toward the bridge. The young reporter turned to behold, in the glare of a storm lantern, the millionaire and the captain examining the end of the severed cable. The first mate was on the bridge, or what corresponded to it, steering the vessel.

"It's cut, all right," said Captain Reardon, as

he handed the end of the cable to Larry. "And it was no accident, either."

"How do you make that out?" asked Mr. Potter.

"Because that's been done with a knife. See how clean the cut is. Of course the sharp prow of another vessel, moving at great speed, might do it, but I don't think it did. If a vessel had come near enough to us to do that we'd have heard it. The man on watch didn't report a thing, though."

"Then how could it have been done?" asked the millionaire.

"Some one sneaked up in a small boat, and used a knife or hatchet," replied the captain decidedly.

"But who——"

"The kidnappers!" cried Larry. "That's who it was."

"But what object could they have?" asked Mr. Potter.

"To prevent our following them," went on the young reporter eagerly. "We must have been too close on their trail, and they wanted to make us meet with an accident, or else they put back out of the blow, discovered us, and tried to wreck us."

"Which they would have done, if this hadn't been discovered in time," said the captain. "In this blow it wouldn't have taken much to send us on shore and then—well, it would be all up with the *Elizabeth*," he finished grimly.

The wind, which had been blowing steadily, seemed suddenly to increase in violence. There was a sharp, jagged streak of lightning off to the west, and it was instantly followed by a sharp clap of thunder.

"It's coming on worse!" cried Mr. Potter. "Is everything snug up here, Captain Reardon?"

"Everything, sir. You might as well get below. I'll double the watch on deck, and we'll keep a sharp lookout for those scoundrels. They must be somewhere in the vicinity, but they've doused their lights. A foolhardy piece of business, too. Whew! There comes a big one!"

As he spoke a mighty wave came aboard, the stanch motor craft fairly burying her nose in it. The spray flew aft, wetting them all.

"Better go below," advised the captain. "It's getting worse every minute."

"Here comes some one!" cried Mr. Potter, as a figure staggered toward them. "I hope Grace hasn't come up."

"It's the second engineer!" cried the captain, for the *Elizabeth*, though comparatively a small boat, carried a full crew. "What is it?" cried the commander.

"The port motor has gone out of commission, sir," was the reply. "We'll have to limp along at half speed."

"All right. Do the best you can. Any chance of repairing it, Murdock?"

"I don't know. I didn't stop to look."

"Very well. Get below, and fix it up if you can. We'll need all the power we can raise in this blow!"

Hardly had the captain spoken than there came a fiercer gust than any that had preceded, and the *Elizabeth* fairly heeled over in the grip of the storm.

"We've got our work cut out for us!" cried Mr. Potter. "Let's get below, Larry; Grace and Mrs. Androletti may be frightened."

"All right," answered the young reporter, as he cast a look off into the blackness, broken only by the white foam-capped waves. He wondered where the kidnappers' vessel was, and what the stolen boy was doing at that moment.

CHAPTER XXII

ANOTHER ACCIDENT

GRACE and the singer were clinging to each other in the main cabin as Mr. Potter and Larry came down.

"Oh, father! what is it?" cried Grace. "Are we going to sink? Are we in danger?"

"Sink? No; not a bit of it!" exclaimed the millionaire stoutly. "The *Elizabeth* isn't the kind of a girl to go back on her friends that way. We're in some difficulties, but they'll soon be over, and we'll have a fine run through the storm."

As he spoke there was a thunder of water on the deck of the craft, and a big wave coming aboard made the boat tremble from stem to stern.

Larry and Mr. Potter were almost thrown from their feet, and had the woman and girl not been sitting down on one of the leather couches they would have been tossed from one end of the cabin to the other.

"Oh! We are sinking!" cried Madame Androletti. "My poor boy! Out in this storm! We are sinking!"

"Nothing of the sort!" exclaimed Mr. Potter.

"Larry, are we in danger?" cried Grace. "Is daddy saying we are safe just to make us not worry?"

"As far as I know we are perfectly safe," answered the young reporter. "For that matter, we are not far from a harbor, and, if the storm gets too bad, we can put in there."

"Of course," agreed the millionaire, "but we are not going to. We are going to catch those fellows and get back the stolen boy! It was some of the kidnappers, Madame Androletti, who I believe cut us adrift. Then came this storm, and one of our motors had to go out of commission just at the wrong moment. But don't worry. We'll pull through all right yet, and we'll have your boy, before many hours—that is, if he's aboard the boat we're after, as I believe he is."

"Oh, and if he should *not* be!" murmured the singer. "I do not think I could stand another disappointment!"

"We'll find him!" cried Larry, with a confidence he did not altogether feel.

"Hadn't you ladies better go to your state-rooms, and lie down?" suggested Mr. Potter.

"Oh, no, daddy, let us stay here," pleaded Grace. "It's so lonesome to be shut up all by yourself when there's a storm. Let us stay here."

"Very well," he assented. "Perhaps it will be better so. I'll have the cook get us up something

to eat—some coffee—that is, if we can drink it without spilling it all over us.”

Indeed, this would probably be the case, for the yacht was pitching and tossing at really alarming angles. Now she would be up on the crest of a mountain of water, and, a moment later she would slide down the inclined side of it, into a valley of foam. Again, she would pitch from side to side like a cork in a whirlpool.

“Look after the ladies, Larry, until I see how things are going,” directed Mr. Potter, as he went to rouse the cook. But there was no need of this, as every man in the crew had been up some time, doing all he could for the safety of the craft, the cook included. Soon the appetizing smell of coffee came to the cabin, though how the cook made it in his pitching and tossing galley was a mystery.

“We’re doing very well,” Mr. Potter came back to report, after having paid a visit to the engine-room. “The stalled motor, which blew out a cylinder gasket, will soon be repaired, and we can make better speed.”

As it was, the *Elizabeth* was just able to hold her own in the storm. She was a large and powerful motorboat, and, even running at half speed, she was quite fast. But it was no ordinary blow that she found herself in after the cable had been cut.

“It shows how desperate they are, and that we

are after the right parties," decided Larry, speaking of the kidnappers.

"But how do you suppose they knew we were after them?" asked Grace, when, during a little lull in the storm, they could eat and drink without having to hold on to something solid with one hand.

"Oh, they are like most criminals, suspicious, I suppose," answered the young reporter. "Then, too, we have been making any number of inquiries about them, and this yacht is one that easily attracts attention. Once it was known that those aboard the *Elizabeth* were looking for a suspicious-looking craft, those on that same craft, if they had a guilty conscience, would hurry to get away."

"And they'll get away as far and as fast as they can," spoke Mr. Potter. "If it hadn't been for this storm, I believe we could have caught them, even after they cut us adrift. As it is, we are going to have no end of trouble."

Madame Androletti was very nervous, and at every pitch and toss of the yacht she started up as though she feared they were going to the bottom. The others did all they could to reassure her, but it was plain that the strain of the last two months was telling on her.

The storm seemed to grow worse, instead of better, as the early hours of morning ticked themselves off. The wind blew a gale, and the thunder and lightning were incessant. The rain, which

had not been severe at first, rapidly increased in violence, until it fairly swept the deck in a deluge, adding to the work of the waves.

But the downpour served one good purpose. It was so heavy at times that it actually beat down the crests of the billows, and that made the boat ride a little easier.

Meanwhile the engine-room force had been working hard on the disabled motor. It was no small task, at best, to replace the gasket, which is like a big washer, designed to make a gas-tight joint between the cylinder and the head. To work in cramped quarters in a storm, with the boat almost standing one on his head, it was all the engineer and his assistants could do.

But they finally accomplished it. The motor had been run at top speed during this time, and now, with some of the strain taken off it, when its mate resumed duty the craft might do better.

"Well, Mr. Potter, we are going to try and run with both motors now," the engineer reported, about five o'clock that morning. What a long night it had seemed since twelve!

"Very well," replied the millionaire. "Take it easy at first."

Slowly the the speed of the *Elizabeth* increased, as both powerful machines spun the screw around, and then, though the storm was not any less, the craft, cutting through the waves, rode on a more even keel.

"Now I think we'd all better try to get some

rest," suggested Mr. Potter. "It will soon be light enough to see, and we will watch for the boat we're after."

They went to their staterooms, but not to sleep. Soon the gray dawn of the November morning shone through the ports, and, with the advent of daylight, the rain, thunder and lightning ceased. But the wind still kept up.

It was on a wild and desolate scene that our friends gazed when they ventured on deck after a hasty breakfast. The big waves of Lake Huron seemed to make that body of water an ocean, rather than a lake. It was very clear, for the storm had blown away all the mists.

"Not a boat in sight," remarked Larry, as he peered through a telescope, which he steadied against one of the wireless masts. "I wonder which way they went."

"They must have run before the storm," decided Mr. Potter. "I think if we keep on our present course we will sight them sooner or later, unless they have——"

He stopped, for Madame Androletti was coming on deck. Even though she did not love the water, she was a good sailor, as indeed were all on board the *Elizabeth*.

"Were you going to say unless they had gotten too far ahead, and have gone ashore?" asked Larry, as he saw the singer go over to talk to Grace.

"No, Larry, I was going to say 'unless they

have sunk,' but I don't like even to think that," answered Mr. Potter. "They must be ahead of us, though with an inferior boat I don't see how they could have outspeeded us. Still, they had a good start, and the wind helped them. Then, too, we were at half speed part of the time."

The storm was beginning to blow itself out. Every hour saw a let-up in the violence of the wind, and when that died away it would mean that the waves would begin to subside. But it was plain the swell would not go down that day.

The *Elizabeth* forged ahead, pitching and tossing. But the passengers were getting used to that now, and rather enjoyed it. The stanch craft had not leaked a drop.

All the morning, by turns, a lookout was kept, and the waste of waters was swept by a powerful glass. But only a few large lake steamers were seen, and Larry knew it was none of these of which they were in search. He wanted to see a small motorboat, the dingier and more dilapidated the better, for that, he believed, would contain the kidnappers and the stolen boy.

It was just after the midday meal had been served that there came a sudden jar to the *Elizabeth*.

"What's that?" cried Mr. Potter, who was on deck with Larry.

"It felt as though we hit something," said the young reporter. "I'll go below and find out."

But there was no need, for, a moment later, the

chief engineer came up. On his face there was a look of trouble.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Potter.

"That gasket again. Two of 'em this time, and I haven't another spare one aboard. We'll have to run at half speed, or else put back for some."

"Well, run at half speed. It's the best we can do," replied the millionaire.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"MOTORBOAT AHOY!"

GLAD as they all were that the storm was abating, there was a little feeling of gloom when the engineer made his announcement about the second accident.

"Oh, daddy! Isn't it too bad!" exclaimed Grace. "Now we may not be able to catch those men!"

"Oh, I think we will," replied her father. "That is, if we can see them. If we can once get within sight of them I believe we can run them down, even if we're only working one motor. All right," he nodded to the engineer. "Do the best you can. Is there no way you make new gaskets?"

"Well, sir, we might be able to cut them out of some washer stuff we have on board, but I'm afraid they wouldn't hold under pressure. They'd blow out again, and they might do more serious damage than they did this time."

"Damage!" exclaimed Mr. Potter. "Was any one hurt?"

"Oh, one of the men had his hand slightly

bruised, when the gasket blew out, but it doesn't amount to much. I wanted him to lay off, but he wouldn't."

"Why not?"

"Well, sir, he says he's got a boy of his own, and he knows how he'd feel if he was kidnapped. You see, sir, the crew all know what sort of a chase we're on."

"Well," and Mr. Potter nodded understandingly.

"Well, this man—he's Jenks, one of the oilers, sir—he said he wouldn't lay off, and make the crew short-handed, as long as he could stick it out. So that's how it is, sir. The men want to capture the boat the worst way, sir, and save the boy."

"I see," murmured the millionaire. "I won't forget Jenks."

"And I won't, either," decided Larry, making a note of the occurrence, to work into the story of the chase which he intended writing for his paper.

So the *Elizabeth* was run at half speed, while the lookout was still kept up for the suspicious craft of which they were in pursuit.

The day wore on. It was about three o'clock, when one of the men stationed in the bow raised a cry:

"Motorboat ahoy!"

"Where?" demanded Mr. Potter, running forward with Larry.

"Dead ahead, sir!"

They looked to where he pointed, and saw a craft, of about half the size of the *Elizabeth*, plowing through the waves. Larry brought a glass to bear.

"Well?" asked the millionaire impatiently.

"It's a shabby enough looking boat," replied the young reporter, "and I can't make any name out on her. It might be the one we want, and it might not."

"We'll have a try at her, at any rate," decided Mr. Potter. "Captain Reardon, put us right for her. We'll get as close as we can, and——"

He hesitated.

"Well?" asked the commander, waiting for orders.

"We can hail them, and ask them for the loan of a gasket. That will be a good excuse, and we really need some. They may not get suspicious then, or, at least, until we get so close that they can't get away from us, crippled as we are. Eh, Larry?"

"I think that's a good plan."

Orders were sent to the engine-room to get all the speed possible out of the one motor in commission, and then the *Elizabeth* forged ahead on what all hoped would be the final spurt in the chase after the kidnappers.

"They don't seem to be moving very fast," remarked Grace, as she looked at the craft toward

which they were making their way. "They are hardly moving at all."

"Oh, if we can only catch up to them—and get my boy!" murmured the singer.

"I don't see a soul on board," said Larry, as once more he looked through the glass. "Maybe the boat has been abandoned."

"No, sir, she is under way," said the lookout. "You can see the foam at her stem, and the exhaust from the motor."

"That's right," admitted the young reporter, when his attention had been called to these points by a trained seaman.

Nearer and nearer together the two craft came. But, just as the lookout was about to give a hail, and make the request for the loan of the gasket packing, there was a sudden increase in the foam under the bow of the suspicious-looking craft.

"She's off!" cried Larry. "They've taken the alarm!"

"That's so!" agreed Mr. Potter. "Oh, if only both our motors were working!"

Dingy looking though she was, smaller in size and evidently inferior in every way, the other craft showed a surprising burst of speed. Rapidly she drew away from the *Elizabeth*.

"Oh, my boy! My boy!" cried Madame Androletti. "I will never see him!"

"Yes, you shall!" cried Larry. "We'll get him yet!"

"Give us all the speed you can!" Mr. Potter called down the tube to the engineer of the motor craft.

"Aye, aye, sir," came back the answer.
The chase was on.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CHASE

THERE was scarcely any wind now, but there was still a heavy swell on the lake. With eager eyes those aboard the *Elizabeth* watched the vessel of which they were in pursuit. It scarcely seemed possible that such an inferior-looking craft could forge ahead of the splendid *Elizabeth*, but she did. Later Larry learned that the boat had been a racer, and was very powerfully engined. But she was in bad order. Even with that she kept ahead.

"Oh, if we only can catch them!" murmured Grace, as she stood beside Larry.

"We've just *got* to!" exclaimed the young reporter.

An hour went by.

"Are we gaining or losing?" asked Mr. Potter of the lookout, a man who had been on the Great Lakes for many years.

"Well, sir, it's hard to say, in a stern chase. That's always a long chase, you know. You can't see whether you're gaining or losing. But I think we're holding our own, sir."

"Good!" cried the millionaire. "I'll give a hundred dollars to every man in the crew if we catch that boat before dark!" he cried.

"And I'll do the same!" exclaimed Madame Androletti. "Oh, if I can but see my boy again!" and she gave way to her emotion. Grace led her below to her stateroom.

"I'll print every man's picture in the paper," offered Larry, and his offer, with the others, soon spread throughout the boat. And, strange as it may seem, the men were almost as pleased at the young reporter's promise as they were at the offer of money.

"They'll all do their best," said Captain Rear-don. "If we had all day, we might do something—we might catch them, even with our disabled engine, for I believe they are only making a spurt. Sooner or later they'll have an accident to their machinery, and then maybe we can get them. They're forcing their motor too hard, I'm sure. But the time is against us. It will soon be dark, and then they'll give us the slip."

"Oh, if we could only get up more speed!" cried the millionaire. "Next time I chase kidnap-pers I'll have a double supply of gaskets aboard!"

Another hour passed, and, if the *Elizabeth* was no nearer her quarry, she had not fallen behind. But it was getting later.

Suddenly there was a cheer from the engine-room.

"What's that?" cried Mr. Potter.

"I'll see," volunteered Larry. He came back on the run. "They've managed to patch up the two gaskets!" he cried. "They're going to start the other motor soon, and then we'll make short work of these fellows."

"Good!" cried Mr. Potter. "How did they manage it?"

"Oh, the men are fairly desperate to make the capture. Most of 'em have families, and they all feel for Madame Androletti. They'd do anything to help her get her son back."

"That's what I like to hear. How soon can we resume full speed?"

"In about ten minutes."

"And then I am afraid it will be too late," murmured Captain Reardon.

"Why?" Larry wanted to know.

The commander pointed to a line of mist creeping over the big lake from the west.

"Fog," he said. "It will be here in a few minutes, and then—good-bye to the chase, no matter how fast we are."

"Fate is against us," said Mr. Potter, "but we'll do our best. They're headed for shore; aren't they, captain?"

"Yes, and they'll get there before we do. Then they'll abandon the boat, and skip out. The search will have to be begun all over again."

Larry groaned. But he did not give up. With anxious eyes he watched the approach of the fog-bank. Then he looked to the boat of which they

were in pursuit. She seemed to be going slower, as if her machinery were giving out.

Suddenly the *Elizabeth* shot ahead. Her other motor was working.

"Here we go!" cried Larry.

But it was too late. In another moment the fog was swirling around them, hiding the other boat completely from view. Thick and wet, the gray blanket settled down, making pursuit out of the question.

"Fate surely is against us," thought Larry. "We'll never catch them now."

Mr. Potter gazed gloomily out into the mist which hung like drops of dew on the rigging, and on the faces of the men. It was an exceptionally heavy fog.

"I shall have to reduce to half speed, sir," said Captain Reardon. "It would be too risky going fast in this mist."

"I suppose so."

"And I'll have to use whistle and bell."

"Yes. It's the only way."

"The only boat in sight when this fog shut down on us," went on the commander, "was the one we were chasing, and she'll keep ahead of us. But there's no telling when a lake steamer might come along, and we don't want to be run down."

"Certainly not," agreed Mr. Potter. "Well, we might as well go below, Larry. The chase is over."

"No, it isn't!" cried the young reporter.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I'm not going to give up. I believe those fellows will land. They'll try to get away on shore, now. But I'm going to keep after them! Is there any town or city off there, captain?" he asked, pointing through the mist toward shore.

Yes, there's a little town—Marshall, I think they call it—dead ahead of us now. I have often put in there in a storm. It's a good harbor."

"Then let's put in there now!" cried Larry. "Most likely that will be where the kidnappers will go. We may be able to pick up the trail from there."

"It's the only thing to do," agreed Mr. Potter.

Madame Androletti did not altogether understand how greatly the fog hindered the chance of catching the other boat, and, mercifully, they did not tell her. They only said that the chase was being kept up.

"I'll get Parlotti yet!" said Larry fiercely. "And I'll have the stolen boy, too."

"Then you still think Parlotti was the one who took him?" asked Mr. Potter.

"If not the one who took him, the one who planned it all. He's a cold-blooded scoundrel!"

The *Elizabeth* crept on. It grew dark early, with the fog to shut out the sun, and though it was but six o'clock when the motorboat tied up at a wharf in Marshall, it was as dark as night.

"Now what's to be done?" asked the millionaire of Larry.

"Get your daughter and Madame Androletti to some hotel," suggested the reporter. "I'm going to take up the trail again."

"How?"

"By inquiring if that other boat came in here. If it didn't I'm going to get in touch with other harbors along here. They're sure to land somewhere."

"All right. I guess that's as good a plan as any. I'll look after the ladies, and get them to the hotel. I can't tell which one until I inquire for the best. I'll leave word with Captain Reardon where we go, and you can call back at the boat and find out. Good luck!"

"I guess I'll need it," said Larry with a wan smile. The case of the stolen boy was getting on his nerves.

"I feel as though I knew Lorenzo very well," mused the young reporter, as he started to make inquiries along the shore front, "and yet, aside from a glimpse of him in the theater, I've never seen him. Well, I hope I find him now!"

Tired, and a bit discouraged, he began his inquiries. At first he did not meet with success, but the shore front was long, and it would take some time to cover it.

The young reporter came to a wharf that extended well out into the lake. It seemed dark and deserted, and he was rather doubtful whether it

would do any good to inquire there. But he realized that he must overlook no possible chances.

As he approached the dark and gloomy entrance he was halted by a sharp voice demanding:

"Well, what do you want?"

"I want to inquire if you have seen a small boat land anywhere around here?" spoke Larry. "A boat with two men and a boy in it. The boy might be sick."

"I don't know. Why do you ask?" came the question, and Larry told briefly about little Lorenzo.

"No such boat came in here," replied the man, as he swung his lantern up to throw the light in Larry's face. "I'm the watchman here, and I've been on duty since five o'clock. I don't let strange boats land at my dock, anyhow. This is private."

"Could they have landed at some of the public docks?"

"Yes, I suppose so, if the watchman didn't care what chances he took."

"Then there are watchmen at all the docks?" asked Larry.

"Yes. They're supposed to be always on guard. But there's a public dock some way down the water front where landings can be made at night, I understand. You might inquire there."

Larry made up his mind to do so, and on his journey down he stopped to inquire at several public wharves. At one, though he walked some

distance inside the shed covering it, he met no alert watchman to stop him.

"This is queer," mused the young reporter. "I thought the watchmen were supposed not to allow any strangers on the docks."

He went on a little farther through the long, dark shed, and, as he approached a pile of merchandise, that had evidently been unloaded from some boat, he heard a voice whisper in tense tones:

"Cheese it! Here comes some one!"

Instantly there was a movement, and then all was still.

"Something wrong here," decided Larry. "I wonder if it could be the men I want? If I only had some sort of a light!"

He paused, listening intently, but all he could hear was the lapping of the water against the piling under the dock. He fancied he could hear the breathing of some one concealed by the pile of boxes and barrels, but he was not sure.

A moment later he heard footsteps approaching, and then he saw the gleam of a swinging lantern.

"The watchman at last," mused Larry. "But I shouldn't wonder but what there were thieves hidden on this dock, unless those who spoke were the ones I'm after."

"Well, what do you want?" asked the watchman sharply, as he saw Larry. "What are you doing here?"

"You might ask others that same question," retorted the young reporter calmly.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I walked in here because I saw no one on guard, and I heard some one say, 'Cheese it!' from behind that pile of goods," and Larry indicated some barrels, bales and boxes.

"You did!" cried the watchman. "Waterfront thieves, I'll wager! Glad you told me. We'll have a look!"

With a heavy club in one hand, and swinging his lantern in the other, the watchman advanced, followed by Larry. But before they could reach the boxes and bales there was a scurry of feet, and several dark figures rushed down the dock.

"Hold on, or I'll shoot!" cried the watchman. But the dark figures did not tarry, running the faster.

A sliver of flame cut the darkness as the watchman fired his revolver, but he had only shot in the air to scare the thieves, and they ran on. As Larry and the watchman followed they heard some one jump into a boat, and, a little later, there was the sound of frantic rowing.

"They got away!" exclaimed the watchman regretfully. "It isn't the first time they've tried to steal things off this dock, and I haven't caught 'em."

"Is this a public dock?" asked Larry.

"Yes, and all sorts of stuff is landed here. The water-rats come in boats and get what they can,

too. I'm short-handed to-night. My partner is sick, and I'm trying to cover both ends of the dock—the land and water. That's why I wasn't on guard here when you walked in. But were you looking for something?"

Larry explained about his search.

"Sorry I can't help you," spoke the watchman. "I don't believe that boat came here. Two men and a sick boy would be sure to be noticed. They didn't come since I've been on the watch, and the day man would surely have mentioned it if he'd seen 'em. Sorry I can't help you, after what you did for me—telling me about those thieves."

"Oh, that's all right," spoke Larry pleasantly. "I'll inquire further. I hope those thieves didn't get anything."

"I guess not. We were too quick for 'em. Those thieves sneaked in here when I was down at the water end of the dock, I guess, pulling my time-clock. I'll take a look at this pile of stuff."

Flashing his lantern on it plainly showed the watchman where a number of boxes had been disturbed, as if the thieves had gotten ready to cart them away, but none seemed to be missing.

"Well, I wish I could help you, but I can't," spoke the watchman, as Larry was about to leave. "I'll give you a note to the watchman at the next public dock. He's a friend of mine, and he may have seen the men you want come ashore."

The note was soon written, and with that in

his possession Larry set out again on his search. At the next public dock he found the man on guard, but his inquiry was fruitless.

It was not until nearly nine o'clock, after three hours of asking questions of dockmasters, long-shoremen and others, that Larry got the trail he had sought so long.

"A motorboat come in out of the fog?" repeated a grizzled dock laborer. "No, I didn't see that, but I did see a small boat, with two men and a sick boy in it, land here about half-past five."

"A sick boy!" cried Larry, his hopes reviving suddenly.

"Yes, they had to carry him. Seasick, I guess. They asked me where there was a boarding house, and the nearest doctor."

"And you told them?" asked Larry eagerly.

"I sent them to the Imperial, one block down," replied the man. "It's a decent hotel-boarding house, and there's doctors nearby. That's all I know."

"And it's enough!" cried the young reporter, pressing a bill into the man's hand. "They're the ones I want. I've got them at last. If Lorenzo is sick they can't move him in a hurry. Getting sick may mean his being taken out of the scoundrels' hands."

"Now for the last act with the kidnappers," and Larry squared his shoulders, and set off for the Imperial.

CHAPTER XXV

A HAPPY MOTHER—CONCLUSION

"AND so they came ashore in a small boat," mused Larry, as he neared the hotel. "I begin to see what happened. Either their machinery gave out, and they had to leave their craft, or they were afraid to land in her, for fear of arousing suspicion. But I think this is the beginning of the end."

He walked up to the clerk's desk in the hotel.

"Two men and a boy," began Larry briskly. "The boy is ill. You have them here?"

He was determined to play a bold game now. It was near the end, he believed, and there was no time for dilly-dallying. He must chance all on a single throw. True, he might be mistaken, but the signs of the trail looked good.

"Yes, they are here," replied the hotel clerk. "The boy was quite ill, but I believe he is better now. He was sick on the water, they said. Italians, all of them, if I'm any judge. They spoke of getting a doctor, and if you——"

"I'll go right up!" exclaimed Larry, anxious to take advantage of the clerk's half-formed idea.

"Front!" called the clerk, ringing a bell to summon a boy to escort Larry to the room of the strangers.

"Never mind. I can find my way if you tell me the number," interrupted the young reporter. For the work he had in hand he wanted no bell-boy to announce his coming.

"All right," spoke the clerk indifferently. "Room ten on the first floor. It's in the rear."

"They always seem to choose the rear," mused Larry, as he started up the stairs, for there was no elevator. The hotel was little more than a boarding house. "Always the rear. They want to be in a position to escape if they have to, I guess, as Parlotti did before, down the fire-escape.

"I wonder if I'll find him here? His name wasn't on the register, though of course he wouldn't go under that name now." Larry had had a brief glance at the hotel book, and saw where the three strangers had registered. The names were not familiar to him.

The hall of the first floor was not well lighted, but Larry could make out the numbers on the doors of the rooms. He paused for a moment in front of Number Ten, and listened. He heard a low, sobbing sound, and then a voice spoke angrily in Italian. It was a man's voice. Another answered.

There was a brief and somewhat heated conversation. Then came more sobs—sobs in the tone of a boy! Larry gritted his teeth. He heard a

boy's voice pleading, and a man's answering in passion.

The young reporter had made not a sound as he approached. He felt that he was at the right room.

"I've got them at last!" he exulted, clenching his fists and shutting his teeth grimly. "This is the end."

In a flash his plan was made. He knew it would not do to knock, and wait for an invitation to enter. Suspicious as the men would naturally be, anyhow, after the chase of the day they would be doubly so.

"I've got to break in on them!" thought Larry. "These doors aren't very strong. The locks are old-fashioned. Here's for a football rush!"

He backed across the hall, and, with all the speed he could gather, he leaped at the door, aiming with his shoulder at the place where he saw the knob and lock.

With a crash that fairly shook the floor, the door burst inward. Larry's hat flew off into the hall. Straight into the room he plunged, and such was his impetus that he knocked over a table, scattering the books on it to the floor.

In a flash he noted the occupants. Two men and a boy—and the boy, at a glance, he knew for the stolen Lorenzo! He, with his dark, curling black hair, and his almost girlish face! In spite of what he had gone through the little lad was well dressed.

"Don't be afraid, Lorenzo!" exclaimed Larry as soon as he could recover himself from the shock of having knocked over the table. "I've come to bring you back to your mother."

The boy was wild-eyed with fright as he stood near the bed in the room, but a look of relief came over his face at Larry's words. He murmured his thanks and sobbed—but happily.

As for the two men, after the first shock of the surprising entrance of the reporter, they sprang to their feet.

"Who are you? What do you want? How dare you break in here?" demanded one.

"You'll find out soon enough who I am, and why I came!" cried Larry boldly. "I came for that boy. We chased you in the motorboat to-day, and now I've found you. Come on in!" he yelled, looking back at the smashed door, as though he had a force to aid him.

"It is all up! Fly!" yelled the other man, adding something in Italian to his companion.

Larry had a glimpse of a second room opening out of the bed-chamber. It was a room with a fire-escape showing at the window. The man made for this, calling to his companion to follow. But the latter, with an angry cry, sprang toward the boy.

Fearing that some harm might be intended the lad, Larry, with a quick motion, leaped over the upset table. In a second he confronted the man.

Baffled in his intention, the fellow raised his hand to strike our hero.

But Larry was not there when the blow came. The young reporter cleverly dodged, and the kidnapper almost overbalanced himself. In a flash, Larry saw his advantage and hit out at him.

This blow found its mark, and the man went down with a crash that shook the room. He uttered a growl of rage as he scrambled to his feet, and again made a rush at our hero.

"That ought to bring help!" thought Larry as he stood on guard, after casting a glance at Lorenzo. "They must have heard him fall all over the hotel."

But no one came, and the man, with a snarl of anger, again struck out. Larry dodged once more, and the boxing lessons he had taken stood him in good stead.

"It's queer he doesn't call out for help!" mused Larry rapidly. Indeed he had but little time to think of anything else but defending himself, and getting things in shape so that he might rescue the stolen boy. Silently, but with a look of hate on his face, the man recovered himself quickly, and made another attempt to hit Larry.

"I have it!" thought the young reporter. "This man dare not call out. He knows no one would come to help him! He daren't give himself away. That's why the other one skipped out! I'm going to tackle him, and make all the noise I want to!"

Larry dodged a severe blow, stooping down

under the man's arm, and the next instant he came up inside the guard of the kidnapper. There was a short, sharp struggle, in which the man was hurled forcibly against the wall, again jarring the whole room. But still no one came to interrupt the fight.

"I guess they must be used to rows like this in the hotel," mused the young reporter.

But the fight could not last long. Out of the corner of his eye Larry could see that little Lorenzo was terribly frightened. The boy might get so alarmed that he would slip away, and then our hero would have all his tracing to do over again.

"I'm going to close in!" whispered Larry to himself, and, a moment later, he hurled himself on the kidnapper, catching him unawares, and nearly taking the wind out of him.

Larry forced the man against the wall, pinning him by the shoulder with his left hand, while he raised his right, ready to drive it into the kidnapper's face.

"Give it up, you scoundrel!" cried Larry.

The man, with one look into the eyes of the young reporter, weakened. Larry had won, and he had captured at least one of the kidnappers, and recovered the stolen boy.

"Quick, Lorenzo!" cried Larry to the small chap. "Ring the bell for help. Keep pushing the button," and he motioned to an electric one on

the wall near the door. "Ring as if the place was on fire. I'll attend to this chap."

All the fight seemed to be taken out of the fellow. He was like a child in Larry's grasp, though he was bigger than our hero. Lorenzo rang like mad, and soon the corridor outside the room was filled with bell-boys, chambermaids, waiters and porters. Then it was all up with the kidnapper. He was bound.

"There's another, though!" cried Larry. "He went down the fire-escape. See if you can stop him. It may be Parlotti, though it didn't look like him. Then call the police to take this one. Lorenzo, I'm going to take you to your mother!"

"Oh, señor, the dear Lord will bless you for that!" cried the boy, as he fell weeping into Larry's arms.

Eager hands took charge of the kidnapper, who was soon turned over to the police. A hasty search failed to disclose his confederate, who escaped, though eventually he was captured.

And then Larry performed what was one of the happiest acts of his life. He restored the stolen boy to his happy mother. In an automobile, one of the few in the town, the trip was made to the motorboat, and then to the hotel where Madame Androletti, Grace and Mr. Potter were stopping.

"Oh, mother!" cried Lorenzo, as he ran into her arms.

"My boy! My boy!" gasped the happy mother,

and then when she had kissed him, her next caress was for Larry, who received it blushingly enough.

"I have two boys now," said the singer proudly. "My own, and the one who brought my own to me."

"But how on earth did you do it, Larry?" asked Grace, when some semblance to calmness had been restored. The young reporter told his story, modestly enough, and Lorenzo added to it.

"And how did they take you away?" inquired the singer of her son.

"It was in the theater where you sang that night," he explained. "A man came to me as I stood in the wings. He said you wanted me to get something from your dressing-room. When he had me in a dark corner he put a cloth over my face. It smelled sweet and sickish."

"Chloroform," murmured Larry.

"Then I felt myself going down," resumed the boy. "When I awoke we were in the cellar, under the stage. He had taken me down a trap-door."

"And that is why none of the theater men saw you taken out," spoke Madame Androletti.

"Yes," said Lorenzo. "I was kept in the basement three days. Then again they made me unconscious. In fact, I was so weak all that time that I could not call out. I think they must have given me medicine to keep me quiet. Then they took me away. Where it was I do not know, but we always seemed to be on the move. We always

went away at night. I think I was in New York part of the time. Then we went on trains and boats. At last I was kept for some time in one room. From there I sent the letter."

"Detroit," said Larry. "I was there soon after they took you away."

"And from then on," said Lorenzo, "we have been traveling about. I heard them say something like 'You Ron,' and I wrote that on a piece of paper, and left it behind. I hoped some one would find it."

"I did," said Larry, with a smile. "It gave me the right clew to Lake Huron, though that was a new way to spell it."

"And from then on we have been on the lake," resumed the boy, as he sat with his arm around his mother. "They kept me below, most of the time, but I knew we were traveling. To-day they seemed worried. It was the night after the storm. Before the storm broke one of the men had gone off in a small boat."

"That was when they cut our cable," said the young reporter.

"Then came the fog," said Lorenzo, "after we had run as fast as we could. Then our engine broke. I was sick from the waves. They put me in a small boat, left the motorboat afloat, and came ashore. Then—oh, how I begged them to let me go, but they would not. And—and—you came!" he exclaimed, with a bright look at Larry. "That is all!"

"But I can't understand," spoke the young reporter. "I've been expecting to run up against Parlotti, or his two tools, all the while, and I haven't seen them at all. Did they take you, Lorenzo?"

"No, not Parlotti at all. I know him. Mother warned me against him, but he did not take me."

"Then who was it?" asked Larry. He learned the whole story a little later.

It seems that Parlotti, in spite of his denials, did plan to kidnap Lorenzo. The deed was to take place the same night the boy was really stolen, but some one got ahead of the big Italian. He had his two tools in the audience, and gave them the signal for ten o'clock, as Larry had seen.

But, in the meanwhile, a half brother of Parlotti, by the name of Baston, who would have shared in the singer's property had Parlotti been able to get possession of it, grew impatient. Baston had several times urged his kinsman to act, and kidnap Lorenzo, but the latter had always some excuse.

Then Baston acted for himself. He managed to make a hiding place in the basement, under the stage, and took the boy there through a trap-door. He gained admission to the stage in the same way, unobserved. Then when the chance came, he fled with the boy and a companion—the same companion whom Larry captured in the hotel. It was Baston who escaped, but was arrested later. The reason he and his confederate did not de-

mand a ransom was because they could not agree on a division.

Parloti was as much surprised as any one at the kidnapping of Lorenzo, and for a time could not understand it. No wonder he was annoyed at the attention Larry gave him.

Then Parloti got a letter. It was from his tool Ferrot, and read:

“The stolen boy will never be recovered. You had better come with us and take your chances. I have a new plan for getting possession of the property.”

It was the fragments of this letter which Larry and the detective found, and which caused them to think that Parloti was the guilty man. But he was not, though he would have been if he had had the chance. He fled to join Ferrot, whose plan, however, did not work. Nor could Parloti, with all his skill, get a trace of Lorenzo. It remained for Larry Dexter to find him. The threatening letter Larry received was from Parloti, who hoped to bluff the young reporter off the search.

“And so the mystery is cleared up!” exclaimed the young reporter, when all the explanations had been made. “And I’m glad of it.”

“And I can’t tell you how glad *I* am!” cried Madame Androletti, as she caressed her son, restored to her after so long. Though he had been treated meanly, Lorenzo soon recovered his health. He

had been drugged a good part of the time, to prevent him from calling for help as his captors took him about the country in their frantic efforts to hide.

"And now to telegraph in the big story!" cried Larry, a little later on that night of excitement. "I guess it will be a 'beat,' all right."

And it was. The next day newsboys called through the streets of New York:

"Extra! Extra! Full account ob de findin' ob de lost boy! Stolen boy recovered! Extra! Extra!"

"Say, I'm going to get out of the business," complained Peter Manton, when he saw Larry's exclusive story. "There's no use bucking against such luck as Larry has."

But we know that Larry's luck consisted of a good deal of hard work.

In order to hasten the recovery of the lad Mr. Potter took him and his mother for a cruise on the Great Lakes. Larry went along, for his city editor decided that he was entitled to a vacation. And Larry very much enjoyed the trip. I might add that Miss Grace Potter was also on the *Elizabeth*.

In due time Madame Androletti resumed her farewell concert tour, and her son was well looked after, so there was no further danger of him being taken away. For that matter, those who had an interest in kidnapping him were serving long terms in prison.

"Oh, Larry, you don't know how good it seems to have you back!" exclaimed his mother, as the young reporter came home after his vacation cruise on the lakes. "It seemed almost as if you were my stolen boy. You're not going away again, are you?"

"Well, not right off, mother," he replied. "I don't know what my next assignment will be. I think I'll make one for myself, and hug and kiss you all!" and he did, from his mother down to little James.

And now, after having followed Larry Dexter through a number of mysteries, which he successfully solved, we will take leave of him for a while.

THE END

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